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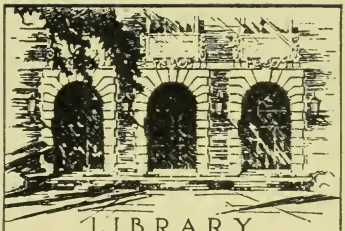

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THE

VICTIMS OF SOCIETY

BY

THE COUNTESS OF BLESSINGTON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

"'Tis you that say it, not I; you do the deeds,
And your ungodly deeds find me the words."

LONDON
SAUNDERS AND OTLEY CONDUIT STREET.

M.DCCC.XXXVII.

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THE

VICTIMS OF SOCIETY.

MISS MONTRESSOR TO LA MARQUISE DE VILLEROI.

MA CHÈRE Delphine, I promised in my last to make you *au fait* of the scene at the theatre, and sit down to perform that promise. *Eh bien donc*, we went to Drury Lane in the evening; and you may judge my astonishment when, in the box *vis-à-vis* to us, we discovered Lord and Lady Vernon, Lady Annandale, and Lord Nottingham.

"*Ah, la voilà!*" said the *comtesse*; "*vous voyez que j'avais raison. Milord Nottingham est avec eux, pour tenir compagnie au papa, comme je l'avois predit.*"

This remark produced a peal of laughter from all but Lord Annandale and myself: he looked furious, because he felt the ridicule of his position, and the *comtesse* had no mercy on him; while I used my utmost endeavours to put a good face on the business, by discoursing on the attachment of Lord Nottingham for Lord and Lady Vernon, with whom, I added, he had been staying in the country since Lady Annandale's marriage.

This statement, implying an ancient friendship, gave a better colour to the affair; and, though it by no means imposed on Lord Annandale, his looks thanked me for it. The *comtesse* pertinaciously observed Lord Nottingham's box all the evening, for it was in it they sat; and shewed as much ill breeding as any fine lady in London could display, though they all are, in general, remarkable for this quality — thinking themselves, I suppose

by virtue of their vocation, privileged to be disagreeable.

Our opposite neighbours left the theatre some time before we did; and, when we arrived at Annandale House, the *comtesse* was so indelicate as to ask the porter if *miladi* had returned, and with whom?

"With Lord Nottingham," was the answer; which brought the blood to Lord Annandale's face, and elicited a spiteful observation from the *comtesse*, as to the freedom from *gêne* of any kind with which *les dames Anglaises* managed their love affairs.

I can see that Lord Annandale begins to detest *sa seigneurie*, and no wonder; for she, to avenge her pique at his having married, hesitates not to say things that you or I, with all the malice possible, could not bring ourselves to utter. *Mais tant mieux*, for her *brusquerie* saves me the necessity of making disagreeable disclosures.

When the party separated, Lord Annandale begged me to indulge him with a few minutes' conversation. I displayed some hesitation and reluctance, which made him still more anxious to retain me.

"I wish to speak to you on a very important subject, my dear Miss Montressor; and, consequently, this is no time to stand on idle ceremony, so let me request you will be seated. You must have observed," he added, "the frequency of Lord Nottingham's visits here; they are daily and long — too long not to give rise to idle and ill-natured comments. I have been too much, and lived too many years, in the world, to attach importance to trifles; but when I see Lady Annandale commit her reputation and my honour, it is time I should look to her conduct."

Here I attempted some futile excuses for her; but he checked me, saying, "I am aware that, from your friendship for her, and your

extreme good-nature" (the first time I ever was considered good-natured!), "you would wish to conceal or palliate her offences; but, I am sorry to say, they admit of neither excuse nor palliation."

"You surely cannot imagine, my lord," interrupted I, "that, blessed with a husband so every way superior to Lord Nottingham," (and here I affected to look confused at my own warmth), "Augusta could possibly bestow a thought on him."

"You are too good, too indulgent, my dear Miss Montressor, to think so favourably of me," and his eyes positively sparkled with pleasure. "It is a fact, of which you, perhaps, are not aware, but with which I have been some days acquainted, that Lady Annandale's position with Lord Nottingham has furnished a topic of scandal in the fashionable world; and we must admit that her conduct must

have been wholly wanting in decorum, or it never could have obtained this publicity in so short a time. What could be more glaring than her choosing to dine out to-day, when she knew I had company at home — Lord Nottingham absenting himself, too, without even an apology? And then, being seen with her at the theatre justifies the rumours in question; and I shall be rendered ridiculous in the eyes of all London, if I do not adopt measures to put a stop to her imprudence."

"Surely, my lord, you would not do any thing harsh, any thing likely to pain or humiliate Augusta. Consider how young, how inexperienced she is!"

"You are an angel, lovely Caroline!" exclaimed he, seizing my hand and kissing it fervently; "and I only wish that Lady Annandale had your tact and discretion, — but of that no woman that I know can boast."

I looked down, tried to blush and appear embarrassed, which, of course, encouraged his boldness, until he unequivocally made me a declaration of love, at which I affected to be shocked; and he repeated his regret that I stood not in the relation towards him that Lady Annandale filled.

"When I saw you doing the honours of my table to-day, my charming friend," continued he, "I could not help being struck with the different effect your influence spread around. Brilliant and witty yourself, you called forth all the agreeable qualities of others; instead of casting a *gêne*, if not a gloom, round the guests, as Lady Annandale's reserved manners invariably do. I wish to fill a certain position in society, for which, I flatter myself, my station, fortune, and talents, qualify me; I mean the position of a leader of fashion, making my house the focus of the

élite of our society. I do not regard this important desideratum with the frivolous feeling of the generality of persons; that is, as a mere object of amusement, or of acquiring fashionable celebrity. No; I view it as a means of obtaining political influence, which our ministerial people have always too much neglected."

Here he looked as profoundly sagacious as if suggesting the mode of carrying the most important political measure; and I affected to consider his puerile fancy, ineffably sapient and momentous.

"Our ministers," resumed he, "arrive at power at too advanced an age to become leaders of fashion. A veteran *élégant* is always ridiculous; witness poor Ledersdale; but, as I took office at a period of life when few are deemed capable of holding it," (you should have seen how self-important he looked!) "I may, without any risk of ridicule, unite the

rare position of a leader of fashion and a man of business. To effect this great object of my desires, Lady Annandale should be a totally different person. She has the *physique*, but not the *morale*, for a position such as *my* wife ought to hold. You, my charming friend, have both. Would that I could —— but it is vain to think of what is impossible."

He does think, and will think, nevertheless, of this seeming impossibility, until it ceases to be one: for his vanity will co-operate with my ambition in perpetually inviting him to the fulfilment of his wish; and, rather than appear as a deserted husband, he will, I am sure, marry again the instant he shall be freed from his present chains, in order to convince the world that he cared *not* for his former wife, and *does* care for her successor. Every time I attempted to advocate Augusta's cause, he silenced me by compliments on my good-nature.

The plea I most strongly urged, to prove the impossibility of her preference for another, was his own superiority. This fulsome flattery ineffably gratified his vanity; for it is so inordinate and voracious that it would devour any thing. But it did not satisfy him that Augusta was willing to accord him this superiority, for her coldness too plainly implied the contrary: consequently, my seemingly most amiable intervention had not the effect of persuading him to forgive her, but only that of making him value me the more, for appearing to believe that she must entertain a favourable opinion of him. You see, *ma belle amie*, that the "comedy of errors" advances just as I foretold and wished; but when a plot is founded on the vanity of man, it seldom fails of success.

Addio, carissima! votre

CAROLINE.

A note from Lord Annandale, requiring a few minutes' audience, has just been placed in my hand. What can he have to communicate? I have not yet seen Lady Annandale, so I am all in the dark. I shall resume my letter after I have seen him.

This business advances more rapidly than I had anticipated, or even desired; and, what is very provoking, will sadly interfere with all the schemes of amusement laid down for the closing of the season. *Mais, c'est egal;* it is all in favour of other and more important schemes. Yet, now that the *dénoûment* of my comedy draws near, I begin to feel a little nervous.

I left off with telling you that Lord Annandale demanded an audience, which I granted. I found *sa seigneurie* in his library, in a state of great agitation. He had, it appears, on

leaving me last night, entered his wife's dressing-room, with, he says, the intention of seeking an explanation from her; but, I strongly suspect, he was very certain she had been some time in bed. He asserts, that a thought occurred to him (it is only husbands who ever have such thoughts), to examine her escritoire — the key lying temptingly on her toilet — expecting to find some tangible proofs of the guilt he imagines; when, lo and behold! instead of sundry amatory billets from *le beau marquis*, he finds naught but my lady's diary. This he considered *mieux que rien;* and so it has proved. Fair ladies, while you live, or, at least, while you love, beware of keeping diaries; or if you will do so, hint not at the feelings of your hearts!

Eh bien, ma chère, I judged rightly; Augusta loves Lord Nottingham with all the enthusiasm, all the romantic fervour, of which

only a young Englishwoman is capable. Yes, *ma belle*, you French ladies, with all your fascinations, and all your sentimentalities (and I give you full credit for possessing both in no ordinary degree), must yield to the untravelled *dames Anglaises* for that strong and enduring affection, which is much less a passion than a sentiment, nursed in secret, and matured in sorrow. The *naïve* expression of Augusta's love for *le marquis*, and the no less *naïve* disclosure of her more than indifference for her liege-lord, have enraged him beyond measure; and, to avenge his mortified vanity, he has determined on exposing her to all the consequences of an open *esclandre*.

Every expression in this unfortunate diary which admits of an equivocal meaning, he has tortured into a guilty one; but I doubt whether any other person could find more in it than

an artless outpouring of the secret feelings of a loving, yet pure heart.

This diary will serve to shew you more plainly than all my descriptions could, that *lusus naturæ*, the heart of a young English woman, which foreigners rarely have an opportunity of studying, and — may I, without offending, add? — more rarely have the power of comprehending. He has lent me this diary, so I shall copy it, and send you my transcript. I affected to plead for Lady Annandale, tried to extenuate some passages in this *naïf* record of her feelings, and to soften others: but what could extenuate, in her vain husband's eyes, that crime of deepest, darkest die, the depreciation of himself, so innocently expressed? Her love for another I do believe he could pardon; but her want of admiration for the person he most admires upon earth, self, he never can forgive.

DIARY OF LADY ANNANDALE.

Yes! Mary Delaward is right. No woman ever should permit the daily visits of any man. O God! why was the bandage not sooner torn from my eyes? Now, alas! it is too late; the arrow has entered into my soul, never to leave it but with life. This deep consciousness of an unhallowed passion will destroy me; and I feel as if all who behold me could read it in characters of shame on my brow. How am I fallen! To whom can I pour out the miseries of my oppressed heart? Not to Mary Delaward's chaste ear can the ravings of an illicit passion be disclosed: she would shrink from me in horror. To Caroline the confession of my error would only excite some heartless jest on the commonness of my misfortune. She would confound me with the crowd of

women whose guilt is not limited to the heart; and I — I that was so proud and so pitiless for their crimes, have lived to experience the dreadful consciousness of a guilty passion,—that first step in the rapid descent to vice and ruin.

I knew not that I loved him until the sentiment became rooted in my soul, and identified with my life. While first listening to thoughts that seemed the voice of my own, I dreamt not that danger awaited me.

> " Each thought of mine an echo found in his;
> Our minds were like two mirrors, placed on walls,
> Fronting each other, and reflecting back
> The self-same objects — such is sympathy."

I fancied, fool that I was, that I only felt for Lord Nottingham the same admiration and deference that I entertained for Lord Delaward. A growing distaste towards the weak man to whom I so madly gave myself, ought to have warned me of the state of my heart, by

shewing that it was the contrast presented to his mediocrity by the noble qualities of Nottingham which had increased my indifference towards him into positive dislike.

But no, I was infatuated — madly, blindly, infatuated, and shut my eyes to the precipice on the edge of which I stood. To count the hours of his absence, to listen for his step, to tremble at his approach, to forget all but him during his presence, and to dread the moment of his departure — this has been my life for months. Mary Delaward must have observed something in my letters, or heard some evil remark, to have induced her to dwell on the danger of male friendships.

That letter first opened my eyes to my danger; yet I had not courage to break off the daily habit of seeing him. Even now that Caroline has spoken more plainly, and I can no longer doubt the fatal truth that he is dear

—oh, how unutterably dear!—to me, yet can I not resolve to separate from him for ever; though that is the only conduct which prudence, duty, and virtue, dictate to me to pursue. How often does the thought intrude, that, when I first saw him on whom my soul dotes, I was still free! and I might have broken off the engagement my inexperience led me to form with a man whom, even then, I felt that I did not, could not love. Why did I not refuse to ratify that fatal compact? I might have been *his* in the sight of God and man; and blessed in, instead of murmuring at, my destiny. It was Caroline's counsel that lured me into this detested marriage — would that the grave had received me before I had formed it!

It is a relief to unburden my heart by committing its overflowings to paper, now that I dare no longer open its secret feelings to

Mary Delaward. Time was when I had no concealment from her; but to this state of mental solitude has my own wilful folly reduced me. With what bitter, what vain regret do I recur to the past; and with what dread, anticipate the future! So young as I am, too — how dreary, how cheerless, are my prospects! A few months ago, whose were more brilliant? — blessed with youth, health, fortune, station; and, above all, with parents so indulgent as to anticipate my every wish. Fatal, fatal indulgence! All this happiness I have perverted by my own folly. I forced these too indulgent parents to yield my hand to one I did not love: and that one step has plunged me irretrievably in ruin!

While we were in conversation on this momentous affair, a servant entered with let-

ters. One of them was an anonymous one, filled with charges against Lady Annandale; stating that her *liaison* with Lord Nottingham was no longer a secret to the public, and that it was even known that more than one of the servants had found the door of her ladyship's boudoir locked on the inside, when she was *tête-à-tête* with Lord Nottingham.

He read this epistle aloud to me, and was nearly maddened by its contents. I affected to doubt the truth of the statement, well knowing the fact; for I it was who slily turned the key of the door by which company enters the boudoir, before I retreated by the private door used only by Lady Annandale and myself. The letter I suspect to emanate from one of the servants; for the practice is not, I am told, an unusual one in London, on such occasions.

I left Annandale writing to his solicitor to come and examine the domestics; on the

subject of the locked door; and, as I know the evidence of, at least, two of them will establish that fact, I have no doubt of the result. I must leave this house before the *esclandre* occurs; for it might be injurious to my future position in society to be at all mixed up with it. To go to the Comtesse Hohenlinden would not be advisable, for she is in very *mauvais odeur* here. In addition to this objection, her lynx eyes would quickly discover the newly developed *tendresse* of Lord Annandale for me, and its probable result when he obtains his freedom — an anticipation which would rapidly convert her into an inveterate foe. I, therefore, see no course for me to adopt, but to return to *ma triste tante* in the country; there to vegetate until a divorce enables Lord Annandale to demand my hand. I shall write, therefore, to my aunt by this post, saying that the air of London disagrees with me, and

asking her to send her carriage for me forthwith. This prudent measure will, I know, gratify Lord Annandale.

And now for the most disagreeable part of the affair — an interview with Augusta; *vis-à-vis* to whom I feel certain uneasy qualms of conscience, which nothing soothes but the conviction, that, after all the publicity of this business is over, she will become the wife of the man she loves, and have to thank me for being the cause of her felicity. I owe her a compensation for having urged her into a marriage which she does not like, and heartily hope she will enjoy all the happiness I wish her; for I cannot help entertaining for her a mingled sentiment of pity and affection, knowing, as I do, the goodness and innocence of *la pauvre petite.*

Again I resume my pen; but I make no

excuses for this interminably long letter, knowing that you will be all curiosity to learn how this complicated plot of mine works. I found Augusta reclined on the sofa in her dressing-room, pale as marble, and apparently agitated. After answering my inquiries respecting her health by a few brief words, stating the illness her looks but too plainly denoted, she told me that "a most extraordinary occurrence had taken place; her escritoire had been opened, and a diary which she had lately kept (how the poor soul blushed when she named it!) had disappeared."

I looked the very personification of surprise and innocence; could not possibly imagine how such a thing could have happened; asked whether she had searched every place for it; and hoped it contained nothing of any importance. I pitied her visible consternation, as she acknowledged that the diary *did* contain thoughts

which she wished no eye on earth to see, save her own. I expressed all the regret imaginable; trusted she would yet find it; and advised the necessity of more caution for the future.

"Do not mistake me, Caroline," said she, gravely; "though I fear I must infer that you have lately done so, from the extraordinary observations you yesterday made to Lord Nottingham on his imprudence in exposing my reputation to suspicion. My honour, and its reputation, I trust, depend, not on Lord Nottingham, but on myself. I may not, when writing down my feelings in the sanctity of privacy, as if pouring them out to *that ear* to which alone erring mortals should have recourse, have concealed the weakness of my heart. But, if my feelings were culpable, my actions were irreproachable. One I could not always command; the other I could, and did."

She looked so proud and calm as she uttered

this, that I stood abashed before her; and endeavoured to excuse what I had said. How corrupt must that mind be, that could have seen Augusta at that moment, and doubted her purity! Yes, my dear friend, there is something sacred, something almost divine, in a perfectly high-souled and virtuous woman. Heigh-ho! would that all women were so!

I told Augusta that I had just heard from my aunt, who, feeling unwell, wished me to return to her.

"I should more regret your departure," said she, "were it not that I think it fortunate for you to be removed from the too frequent intercourse you maintain with the Comtesse Hohenlinden; an intercourse which I consider most disadvantageous to you, my dear Caroline, in every point of view."

Perhaps she was right; but, be that as it may,

I was so subdued by the recollection of the unvarying affection and gentleness of the creature before me, and the knowledge of the duplicity of my conduct towards her, that, as I remembered we must henceforth be strangers (for the *future* wife of Lord Annandale must not be the friend of the *past*), a pang of remorse and regret reminded me that I am not so philosophic as I had imagined myself to be; and I felt as if taking an eternal farewell of her whose destiny my influence had determined. Selfish and calculating as I have hitherto been — and I admit that I have been both in no common degree — yet I do believe, that, were I not convinced that with Lord Annandale, Augusta never can be happy, and with Lord Nottingham she will, I should even now retract, were it possible; for I could not bring myself to drive this innocent and confiding creature to shame

or sorrow. But she must, she will be happy with Nottingham—I will not allow myself to doubt it.

I shall write a few lines to Lord Nottingham without a signature, informing him of the attachment he has inspired in Augusta's heart. To how few men would such a piece of intelligence be necessary, for the vanity of almost all would have anticipated it; but he is too excellent to be vain. How superior is he to Annandale! How very ungentlemanly was it of the latter to open surreptitiously his wife's escritoire, and how indelicate to read and shew her diary! This is a proceeding which, even while it forwards my views, I must still contemn; and all right-minded Englishmen would, I think, agree with me in this sentiment. It displays so clearly a meanness, and want of high principle, that it leads me to determine on keeping *sa seigneurie* in good

order whenever he becomes my lawful property; and I will have a lock to my escritoire that will puzzle him to open it, I promise him. *Addio, cara!* you shall yet see a coronet encircle my brow, and come to London to behold how well I shall enact the new *rôle* of a leader of fashion, though never forgetting that of

Votre amie devouée,

CAROLINE.

FROM LORD NOTTINGHAM TO EDWARD MORDAUNT, ESQ.

I DEBATED long with myself this morning, my dear Mordaunt, whether I ought to call at Annandale House, or not, to-day. It occurred to me that, if I did not call, the servants

might attribute my absence to some consciousness relative to the discovery of the locked door yesterday, and therefore I went; perhaps, too, the hope of seeing her on whom my soul dotes, also influenced my decision. The porter told me his lady was not at home, in a tone (but it might have been my imagination that so interpreted it) which seemed more than ordinarily *brusque*. I asked, whether Lord Annandale was at home? but he, also, was denied, though his cabriolet was at the door.

What can this conduct mean? Was the order given by her, or by him? I remember that there was a *fierté* in her countenance I never before saw it wear, when Miss Montressor commented on my compromising Lady Annandale's reputation; and the proud and indignant manner in which she repelled the insidious insinuation of that lady, still is pre-

sent to my memory. Probably that heartless woman's observations have induced Lady Annandale to close her doors against me; and, if she have so acted, while lamenting this cruelty, I must admit its wisdom. I never should have had courage to tear myself from her sight; for I am become weak and vacillating as a child. This engrossing passion has mastered all my energies, destroyed my best resolves, and left me naught of manhood but its wilfulness.

I have this moment received an anonymous letter, in a female's hand — its contents astonish me! It states that I am beloved — yes, fondly beloved — by the woman, the writer is sure, I prefer above all others on earth; that the natural reserve, prudery, or sense of duty, call it what I will, of the lady in question, may induce her to conceal her affection for me; but that I may rest assured that affection

exists, and must not despair, though the person who entertains it should continue to repress all external symptoms of it.

This letter is signed, "A Friend," and must, I am sure, come from Miss Montressor. Who else knows or suspects my feelings? And yet what could be the motive of such a communication? I am all bewildered! I will call on Lord and Lady Vernon; perhaps they may be able to throw some light on the rejection of my visit at Annandale House.

I found Lord and Lady Vernon in their library, both greatly agitated, and the latter in tears.

"Look here," said Lord Vernon, handing me a letter; "this is the fac-simile of one addressed also to my wife. It is anonymous, and contains the most vile and infamous charges against the honour of our child. Yours, also, is assailed; but we know you

too well, my dear lord, brief as has been the term of our friendship, to doubt your honour, any more than we do that of our idolised Augusta, on the faith of whose virtue we would risk our lives. But to have that virtue questioned, and her name thus profaned, is indeed a severe blow."

So saying, he pointed to a pile of newspapers, in which, he said, the most indelicate references were openly made to a supposed attachment between Lady Annandale and myself. Now was it that all the guilty imprudence of my conduct, in so frequently attending Lady Annandale in public, and visiting her daily, appeared in its true light, while I perused the disgusting attacks to which my selfish folly had exposed her; and beheld the shame and sorrow it had inflicted on her excellent parents. I, who knew the world, ought to have foreseen that such must be the result;

but, criminal as I was, I closed my eyes on the danger to which my attentions subjected her; and have, consequently, been the means of having that honour impugned which I would have risked my life a thousand times to defend.

I stood shocked and abashed before Lord and Lady Vernon; for, though free from even a guilty thought with regard to their daughter, my conduct had all the semblance of guilt. The innumerable *liaisons* between parties of my acquaintance, of whose culpability no doubt exists, were all characterised by conduct similar to mine; so that I had injured the reputation of this pure-minded and innocent woman to the utmost extent, by the selfish indulgence of seeking her society in a manner that must have impressed a belief of impropriety on the minds of all who had opportunities of observing it.

"If Augusta should become aware of these

vile rumours," said Lady Vernon, "the consequences would be dreadful indeed; her pride and delicacy would be mortally wounded. Oh, my poor, dear, innocent child! in whose pure imagination, a belief, even of the guilt of which she is openly accused, never could find a place against one of her own sex, and to be thus profaned in the eyes of the public!"

Here a paroxysm of tears interrupted the mother; and, as I beheld them chase each other down that venerable, and hitherto calm countenance, where shame had never before brought a blush, I execrated myself.

A note was now delivered to Lady Vernon, and another to her husband. The father reddened to his very brow as he perused it, and anger flashed from his eyes.

"He shall answer for it!" said he, throwing the letter on the table; but at this moment Lady Vernon dropped, fainting, from her chair,

and we both ran to assist her. She soon revived; and, pointing to the letter, begged that the carriage might be immediately ordered.

"We must go for our poor child," said she, turning to Lord Vernon with a look of unutterable anguish; "the house of Lord Annandale is no longer a befitting abode for her."

"Read these," said Lord Vernon, laying down the note to his wife, and handing both to me. "I will not, Lord Nottingham, so far insult the purity of my injured daughter as to imagine that blame can attach to her; but, with her youth and inexperience, she may, through ignorance of that world into which she was too early thrown, have been neglectful of the appearances which, in the tainted atmosphere of London, are more studied than the reality of virtue. But you, my lord, who knew the danger, surely you have not been so culpable, so cruel towards my daugh-

ter and towards us, whom you professed to like, as to have exposed her, by your attentions, to the vile imputations now cast upon her honour? Her unworthy husband—for unworthy he must be, not to have better guarded the treasure we confided to his care, and for believing that guilt could attach to our child — writes to say that it is his intention to seek legal redress, and that he wishes Lady Annandale to leave his house."

"Let us go immediately for our daughter," said Lady Vernon; and she rang the bell impatiently, to order her carriage.

I glanced my eye over the letters, scarcely conscious that I had not even attempted an answer to Lord Vernon. What answer could I make, overpowered as I was with the oppressive weight of regret for the injury I had inflicted on their daughter, and on them? Annandale's letter was cool and collected, con-

taining only a few lines, stating his intentions nearly in the words that Lord Vernon had repeated. Lady Annandale's note was nearly obliterated by tears, and ran nearly as follows—for every line of it is imprinted on my memory: —

"Mother, dear mother! I am accused of a crime of deep die. Your child is disgraced and dishonoured; but *you* will not believe her guilty, though all the world beside may condemn her. If I fancied you or my father could for a moment imagine me guilty, even in thought, of the crime with which I am charged, I could not live. Why, why did I ever abandon you? I am all bewildered, and have but one feeling, one wish left; and that is, to quit this hateful roof, and (*die* had been written, and then half defaced) return with you to the home of my infancy—there to hide myself from the shame that has seared my

very soul, and destroyed for ever the peace of your AUGUSTA."

And all this was my work! Oh, Mordaunt, to what fearful results does the indulgence of selfishness lead!

"You will feel the propriety, my lord," said Lord Vernon, gravely, but more in sorrow than in anger, "of our avoiding all intercourse with you for the future."

I attempted to utter something, but he stopped me; and, waving his hand, begged me to remember, that to him no exculpation of the honour of his child was necessary, because he never could doubt it. I felt that I ought to withdraw, and left their presence, writhing under the consciousness that I had inflicted the deepest wound on their peace, and destroyed the reputation and happiness of her who is dearer to me, a thousand times, than life itself. I am wretched, my dear Mor-

daunt, and feel that, could I but justify the purity of Lady Annandale, I would forego the hope of ever again beholding her; though that hope has sustained me ever since I have indulged the fatal passion that has wrought such misery to her.

Ever yours,

NOTTINGHAM.

MISS MONTRESSOR TO LA MARQUISE DE VILLEROI.

I HAVE just witnessed, *ma chère amie*, the most painful scene; and my nerves are so dreadfully shaken by it, that I can scarcely hold my pen. I wish I had never embarked in the scheme that has produced all this *chagrin* to persons for whom I really felt no ill-will; for, now that the *dénoûment* of what I intended should be a comedy is at hand, it begins to

look more like a downright, earnest tragedy; and I hate tragedies, off or on the stage. But, to resume. Lord Annandale's solicitor questioned the servants: the story of the nurse being forbid to bring the child to the boudoir, and the locked door, came out; and these, coupled with Lord Nottingham's long and daily visits, were considered by the man of law as conclusive proofs, fit to satisfy a jury. Consequently an action for damages is to be forthwith commenced against Lord Nottingham, preparatory to an application for a divorce.

Lord Annandale communicated this intention to poor Augusta, in a laconic letter, containing some imperious lines; and also wrote to her father, informing him of his desire that she should leave Annandale House. He begged of me not to see her, and proposed my going to the Comtesse Hohenlinden's until my aunt sent for me, as it was derogatory to my present and

future position, he said, to remain a single day beneath the roof of a woman who had so completely compromised her honour as Augusta had done. I could not resist asking him whether he was not aware that the *comtesse* had compromised hers a thousandfold more? He looked at me with surprise, and then answered,—

"That the actual guilt of the parties was not the point to be considered; but the circumstance, that, in the case of Lady Annandale, not only was the guilt presumed, but the husband had denounced her: whereas the husband of the *comtesse* still countenanced her; and, consequently, her honour was in no degree compromised."

And this, *chère amie*, is the moral of the fashionable world in London!

It appears that Annandale, with his usual *faiblesse*, has kept the *comtesse au courant* of all

that he has discovered. I strongly suspect, *entre nous*, that *sa seigneurie*, prompted by jealousy of the beauty, and anger at the reserve and coldness of Augusta's manner to her, has urged him to be still more severe towards his poor wife; though this instigation was unnecessary, for the wound offered to his vanity by the terms in which he is named in the diary, has rendered him implacable. I have ascertained from his own lips that it was my artful flattery which won his decided preference for me; consequently I have not the satisfaction of thinking, that otherwise he would ever have liked me. Vain, weak, and unfeeling man! if he knew that, even while profiting by his weakness, I despise him, what would he think?

I have received a note from the Comtesse Hohenlinden, which I send to you. What a world we live in!

"*Ma chère* Caroline, poor dear Lord An-

nandale has informed me of the shocking conduct of *miladi*. Now that it is all discovered, and the whole town talking of nothing else, it will be very improper in you to stay a single hour under the same room with a person who has compromised her reputation so dreadfully. She will, of course, be cut by every one; and few will pity a lady who was so very prudish and severe towards others. I shall be charmed to receive you, *ma chère, chez moi*, and have ordered an apartment to be prepared. The carriage shall convey you from Annandale House at any hour you will name. I should in person conduct you hither, but I have such a horror of coming in contact with that very naughty woman, or of being even supposed to enter Annandale House while she remains in it, that I dare not go to you. The *comte* is, and with reason, extremely particular that I should not commit myself by associating with

any one whose reputation is tainted; and I, also, am fully aware of the necessity of preserving appearances, and not violating *les convenances* on which the preservation of society so wholly depends.

" I have had a conclave of ladies with me this morning to consult on this terrible affair. Lady Castlemartin declares, that if we do not shew a proper severity towards Lady Annandale, husbands will begin to suspect that their wives are lenient from a sympathy with the delinquent. *A-propos de* Lady Castlemartin, she is just now greatly annoyed; for her friend, Lord Eaglesfort, has thrown off her chains, and is about to put on those of Hymen. She is *très en colère* with him; but, I think, not indisposed to transfer her affections to the Marquess of Nottingham, should he be disposed to console her.

" But, to return to our conclave. Lady F.

says, that if we wish to preserve our own liberty, we must shew no mercy to those who manage so ill as to be detected; thereby, more or less, compromising all their *clique:* and Lady H. advises, that we at once renounce, not only Lady Annandale, but any woman who countenances her. You will thus, *chère* Caroline, see the necessity of at once leaving Annandale House; and I will take care to have it well understood, that you declined seeing its mistress from the moment you heard of her guilt.

"I have written to ask poor dear Lord Annandale to dine with us *en petit comité.* I do so pity him! such a good and kind husband as he was, and so anxious to make his house agreeable; always filling it with the most fashionable people in London. How happy that silly woman might have been, had she only had proper tact! I lose all patience in thinking of her folly.

"*Adieu — au revoir! votre amie.*"

What think you of *notre frau gräfinn's* prudery? Is it not amusing? I have detailed all this to you, to postpone relating the painful scene to which I referred at the commencement of my letter, as children put off their tasks until the last moment. *Eh bien, donc, ma chère*, in defiance of Lord Annandale's and the *comtesse's* counsel, not to communicate with Augusta, I went to her dressing-room. I had not seen her last evening, as she sent to say she was too unwell to receive a visit from any one; so I passed the evening listening to the vows of her *caro sposo*, who expresses the utmost impatience to be freed from his present matrimonial fetters, that he may be enabled to put on others, as he says, more to his taste. I found poor Augusta as pale, and nearly as lifeless, as a statue, with an expression of anguish and despair in her countenance, that

might have melted a more stubborn heart than mine. How truly did I wish at that moment that I could accomplish my own schemes without occasioning her a moment's pain! *Mais, hélas!* that is impossible. I am a strange creature: ready to plot, but not capable of beholding the sufferings I inflict without a regret: I have not firmness to resist evil, nor hardness enough not to repent yielding to its dictates. I tried to comfort her; but she shook her head, and said,—

"You surely do not know the crime with which I am charged, Caroline, or you could not attempt to console me."

I told her, as gently as I could, that I was fully aware of it; and I saw her shudder as I made the avowal.

"You do not, then, believe me guilty?" asked she. "No, you do not, you cannot think so ill of me!"

I could not resist expressing my conviction of her perfect innocence (who so well knows it as I do?); and, as she passionately pressed my hand, she burst into a paroxysm of tears, which seemed to relieve her. This little act of confidence and endearment produced such a revulsion in my feelings as to make me wish to throw myself at her feet, and confess the deep injury I had inflicted on her. Tears came to my eyes, and this emotion increased her confidence towards me.

"Lord Annandale," she continued, "has written to say that he can establish my guilt by proofs that admit of no doubt. What they are I know not; I only know — and the God who hears me can be witness of my solemn averment! — that a thought of guilt has never entered my mind." (And well do I believe it.)

"But, dear Augusta, if, by producing

proofs which, however innocent you are, can establish grounds for a divorce and restore you to liberty, enabling you to marry the person you love ——"

"Then you are acquainted with my weakness," interrupted she, blushing a deep red; "that whole, sole, and involuntary crime, of which I am guilty? Oh, Caroline! how little do you know me, if you imagine that, branded with guilt, though conscious of my innocence, I could bring shame and disgrace to the man I loved. Were I free to-morrow, no power could compel me to become the wife of the person to whom you allude: and if, indeed, you have any respect left for me, never again refer to the possibility of such a measure."

"But *he*, knowing your innocence, and being aware that it was his too conspicuous attentions which have involved you in this dilemma — he, surely, loving you, as I am fully

persuaded he does, would vanquish your unreasonable scruples, and reason you into accepting the happiness that, as his wife, may, and will, I trust, still be yours."

"Never, never! Think you, Caroline, that I would so far justify the odious, the abominable charges of which I am accused, as to wed the object of them?"

I would have replied, but she entreated me with such earnestness never to touch on the painful, the humiliating subject again, that I ceased to urge her; convinced, from her whole tone and manner, that one of the hopes which had hitherto actuated me, and palliated, in my own estimation, the scheme I had pursued (namely, the hope of her marrying the Marquess of Nottingham), would now be frustrated: and this conviction brought a pang of remorse and regret to my heart, of which I had not thought it capable.

The truth is—but, alas! I have ascertained it too late—I have totally misjudged Augusta's character, and miscalculated the effect that my plan would produce on her. I judged her by the generality of women I have known; all of whom would have gladly escaped from the thraldom of a marriage with a man unloved, to the happiness of a union with the object of their affection, even though that happiness was purchased at the price of an *esclandre*, such as now awaits Augusta. I have hitherto disbelieved in female virtue, imagining it to be a chimera, or, at best, a principle that rarely, if ever, opposed an insuperable barrier to the temptation of love. But I now see my error, and I tremble at having been the means of destroying the peace of mind of this young and innocent being; now that I am aware she will not accept the panacea that I hoped would have given her repose. Would that I had

never interfered in this business, or that I had sooner acquired the knowledge of Augusta's character, which now begins to dawn on my mind; for, selfish as I confess myself to be, I do believe that I should never have thought of sacrificing her repose to attain the fulfilment of my own views.

I felt like a culprit before this injured creature, still nearly a child in years; and, when I beheld the expression of anguish imprinted on her beautiful face, and reflected how many years she may be condemned to drag on a life of sorrow, I shrank before the consequences of my fatal scheme, and could have wept over my victim.

Her father and mother now entered the room; and my heart sank within me as I witnessed the change effected on their appearance within a few hours. Long, long years seemed to be added to their age; and grief,

which is always so affecting in the old, was stamped on their brow.

"I am innocent; indeed I am innocent, dear father and mother!" exclaimed Augusta, throwing herself into their arms.

"We know that you are, my child!" replied her father, pressing her fondly to his heart. "We never, for a moment, doubted you!" sobbed her weeping mother, clasping her fondly to her maternal bosom.

"Come, my precious Gusty," said Lord Vernon; "come to your home. Would to God that you had never left it! I cannot bear that you should stay an hour longer beneath the roof of one who could suspect your purity, or who could prove himself so unworthy of the treasure we confided to him."

"Yes, my father, I will go," replied Augusta; "but let me first see the dear child:" and she burst into a flood of tears; for, even at

this moment, she could forget her own grief to pity the poor boy, who was again doomed to the neglect from which she had rescued him.

The child was brought; and when he saw her, he rushed to her arms, clasping her round the neck with all his strength, and covering her tear-stained cheeks with kisses. She anxiously recommended him to the nurse's care, promising to reward her if she fulfilled her duty towards him faithfully; and dismissed not the child and his weeping attendant without tears, that attested her attachment to the poor boy, who could hardly be forced from her arms, to which he fondly clung.

Lady Vernon now instructed the *femme de chambre* to convey her lady's wardrobe to Grosvenor Square; and then said, —

"You will come with us, Caroline, will you not? as this is no longer a fit residence for you."

I told her that I was immediately leaving town, as my aunt had sent for me.

" What, sent for you already?" asked Lady Vernon, her pale cheek suffused with the blush of wounded pride.

" Caroline was to have gone, even if—— (here Augusta paused) for her aunt is ill."

The worthy old couple pressed my hand kindly, and hoped I should find my good aunt better.

" Come, my child, let us leave this house," said Lord Vernon,—" I cannot breathe freely in it."

The *femme de chambre* brought a cloak and bonnet for Lady Annandale, which I assisted her to put on, my hands trembling so violently that I could hardly perform this little service.

" Put on a black veil," whispered Augusta, her voice nearly choaked by emotion; and then, embracing me tenderly, she left the room,

supported by her father and mother. That embrace made me shudder! Was not mine the Judas-kiss? I followed her, with the vague purpose of imploring her pardon — of, perhaps, confessing how deeply I had injured her; but she had already reached the vestibule, in which all the servants were marshalled, and I shrank from exhibiting myself before them in my present state of agitation. I ran to the front drawing-room window, to catch one more glance of her: my heart melted with pity and remorse. She was on the steps, slowly descending with tottering pace, when the Comtesse Hohenlinden and Lady Castlemartin drove up to the door. They stared rudely at poor dear Augusta, without, however, bowing to her (how I hated them both at the moment!); and when Lord Vernon's coach had disappeared, both ladies entered the house, demanding to see me.

"*Imaginez-vous, ma chère* Caroline, to what my friendship for you has exposed me!" said the *comtesse*, as she hurried into the room.

"Yes, indeed, it was quite dreadful!" interrupted Lady Castlemartin; "only fancy our having met that very shocking person, Lady Annandale, who was descending the steps when we drove up! She looked at us positively, as if she expected us to bow to her; but we, naturally, took not the least notice of her: and, would you believe it, she was rouged up to the eyes — I saw it even through her veil!"

"*Et ce pauvre cher* Lord Annandale!" resumed the *comtesse;* "he is, indeed, much to be pitied, to have been so abominably deceived by such an artful, designing prude."

"I dare say she will try to persuade Lord Nottingham to marry her as soon as she is divorced," drawled out Lady Castlemartin;

" but she may be assured that, even if he should commit such a folly, she will never find herself again admitted to our circle. No; we must really establish a *cordon sanitaire*, to exclude all tainted persons from coming in contact with us."

What will you say, *ma chère amie*, when I tell you, that this same Lady Castlemartin is openly accused of a plurality of lovers? Yet this is the woman who would exclude the pure and high-minded Augusta from society, because she believes her to have had one! I felt so indignant with both of them, that I could with difficulty restrain the expression of my sentiments; though, to effect any good by revealing them, would, I well know, be a vain hope.

" Finding that you did not answer my note," resumed the Comtesse Hohenlinden, " I determined on coming here to seek you.

I had inferred, from a billet I received last night from poor dear Lord Annandale, that that dreadful person would have left his house early this morning; but, not thinking it right to come here alone, I called on Lady Castlemartin to accompany and *chaperon* me."

"I hope no one will discover that we have been here," said Lady C. "Fancy how shocking it would be to get shewn up in the Sunday papers; and be, perhaps, accused of visiting that dreadful person who has just left the house!"

"Pray, get on your things, *ma chère* Caroline," said the *comtesse;* "for the sooner we go the better. Your apartment is quite ready *chez moi;* so let us depart."

When I told the *comtesse* that I was immediately leaving town to proceed to my aunt's, she could hardly credit me; and when she found I was determined to fulfil this re-

solution, in defiance of all her advice and entreaties, she seemed displeased.

"*Imaginez-vous, ma chère, à quoi vous vous exposez,*" said she, "in remaining a single hour beneath the roof of a man who may now be considered in the light of a *garçon!*"

"I expect the carriage that is to convey me to the country every moment," I replied; "so you need be under no apprehensions for my reputation."

"In that case I will remain with you until you depart," resumed the *comtesse,* who, I believe, has latterly become jealous of me, from having observed Lord Annandale's attentions; and, as she announced this intention, down she sat.

I rang the bell to quicken my preparations; and, having addressed a few lines to Lord Annandale, to say that he might write to me at my aunt's, I left the house, attended

by my *femme de chambre;* the *comtesse,* and her prudish *chaperon,* having waited to see me drive off before they took their departure.

I am now writing to you from the inn, *en route,* where I stop for the night. I anticipate, with no slight dread, a long and *triste séjour* at my aunt's; but a visit to her is, nevertheless, the most prudent measure I could adopt. I suppose it will be a year before the divorce can be obtained. What an age to look forward to spend in that castle of dulness, the *chateau de madame ma tante! Plaignez moi, chère amie, et écrivez souvent à votre*

CAROLINE.

THE COUNTESS OF DELAWARD TO THE EARL OF DELAWARD.

A FEW lines have just reached me, my beloved, from Lady Vernon, saying that Augusta is separated from her husband, and dangerously ill at their house. She adds, that Lord Annandale has impeached the honour of his wife, and intends seeking legal redress against Lord Nottingham. You see our worst fears, as to poor Augusta's unhappy marriage, are more than realised; but so confident do I feel of her integrity, that I am fully persuaded she is perfectly innocent of this vile charge. I wish to go to her, my dear Charles, for it is on occasions like the present that the countenance of a friend can be of use; and I am quite sure you will give me your sanction to proceed to London. How I lament that you are absent at this crisis! for your presence would be a

solace to poor dear Lord and Lady Vernon, and a blessing, as it always is, to your own

MARY.

P. S. I send this by an express, and hope to hear that your poor uncle is better.

THE EARL OF DELAWARD TO THE COUNTESS OF DELAWARD.

How I regret being absent from you at this moment, my own Mary! I entirely approve your going to your unhappy friend; and agree with you in thinking, that it is when those who are dear are in affliction, that friends should prove that they are not mere pretenders to the name. Pray, take care of yourself, for my sake, dearest: nothing short of the present emergency could induce me to allow you to

undertake this journey alone; so let me implore you to be careful of your health. My poor uncle is so much worse, that I fear all will soon be over.

Angels guard and bless my Mary,

Prays her fond husband,

DELAWARD.

THE COUNTESS OF DELAWARD TO THE EARL OF DELAWARD.

I ARRIVED here much less fatigued than could be expected, my beloved Charles; and found poor Augusta dangerously ill with a violent fever. She knows no one, raves incessantly, and the physicians entertain great doubts of her recovery, unless a speedy change occurs in the disease. Her unhappy father and mother are in a state of mind impossible to be described.

My arrival affected them to tears; for they looked on it, and with reason, as a proof of my perfect conviction of her innocence.

"You do not, then, believe our child guilty?" said Lord Vernon.

"Never could I harbour such a belief for a moment," answered I; "for I have known her too long and too well."

"Bless you for that!" replied Lady Vernon, bursting into tears.

They say that, for the first two days after she left Annandale House, she appeared tranquil, but terribly depressed in spirits. At the expiration of that time, a packet of newspapers, one or two vile caricatures, and a coarse anonymous letter, were brought to her; after the perusal of which she was seized with violent fits of trembling, and an acute pain in the head, which the physician pronounced to be an attack of brain-fever, induced by severe

mental anguish. I have just been sitting by the bedside of the sufferer, and her ravings have shocked me.

" Do not let Lord Nottingham learn that I loved him, I implore you ! " she repeatedly utters. " It would be dreadful were he to know my affection ; I never could see him again. Oh, why am I married ? Mary Delaward said, that married women must not have male friends. Do not, in mercy, tell her that I love him ! She never would look on me again, were she made acquainted with my guilt. Oh, Caroline, do not leave me alone with him, for I tremble lest he should look at me, and discover the passion that is consuming me ! Do not tell me that he loves me ; say, rather, that he hates me ! Yet, no — repeat once, only once again, that he loves me, and then let me die ! Who said that I was innocent ? Oh, it was my

father and mother: I remember it now. But they did not know that I loved Lord Nottingham; if they did, they would think me guilty, and hate me. Do not, do not reveal the dark secret to them; but let it be buried with me when I am hid in the grave! Burn all those horrible newspapers — all — all! suffer not one to escape. See! they are posted on every wall, every house — on the trees — ay, and on the clouds! and the whole world are reading them, and chattering, and jibbering, and screaming my name; and the trumpets are proclaiming it all through the earth, and every finger is pointing at me! Oh, 'tis dreadful! Hide me — hide me — deep, deep in the earth; ay, even in the dark grave!"

It is thus, my beloved, that she has raved during the two hours I have been sitting by her bedside; and so piteous are her accents, that they have pierced my very heart. My

fears are verified. She loves Lord Nottingham; but this unhappy passion is the extent of her error, as all her ravings denote. The revolting statements in the papers, so cruelly sent to her, have overpowered her already excited mind. Poor dear Augusta, with all her youth, beauty, and innocence! — bitterly has she atoned for her indiscreet, her fatal choice of a husband!

She has been more tranquil for the last three hours, and has now fallen into a calm sleep. God grant that she may be relieved!

To-morrow you shall hear again from your own MARY.

THE COUNTESS OF DELAWARD TO THE EARL OF DELAWARD.

My poor suffering friend had a quiet night, and awoke in her senses; though so languid as to create serious apprehensions for her life. She asked who was in the room. I made signs to her maid to answer: she, however, had fallen asleep; so I was forced to address to her two or three words of reply, but in a low tone.

"Do I still dream?" she demanded; "surely I know that voice. Is that Mary Delaward?"

"Yes, dearest Augusta, it is your early, your fond friend."

She tried to take my hand, but had not strength to effect her purpose. She then motioned to me to withdraw the curtain, and, when I had complied with her wish, she looked

at me with an expression of such deep tenderness and anguish, that I felt nearly overpowered.

"*You*, Mary, have not believed me the guilty, the lost creature, they would fain make me appear. No; the good and pure are slow to condemn."

"Do not speak now, dearest Augusta," said I; "and, if possible, do not think, until you have regained some portion of your strength."

She shook her head, and answered,—

"That will never be. Oh, Mary! you know not what I have suffered: to have brought shame to the brows of my dear father and mother; to be returned to their honourable roof dishonoured; to have hundreds—nay, thousands, believing me all that my very soul abhors, and my name coupled with crime! Yes, I feel it has broken my heart;" and she sank

her head on the pillow, exhausted by her emotion.

"But all who know you, dearest Augusta, are convinced of your innocence; they never, for a single moment, doubted it."

"Bless them for that belief!" she replied; "it is the only drop of balm in the cup of sorrow I have nearly emptied. Yet, dear and true friend, this is no time for deception; you must not think me better than I am. Though free from actual guilt, or even from the thought of it, I have allowed" (and here her pale cheeks became suffused with the deepest red) "an unhallowed passion to usurp my heart, to dethrone my reason. Was not this a crime, and of deep die?"

"We are all weak and fallible, my dear Augusta; but the Almighty is merciful, and pardons the involuntary errors of his frail

creatures, when they have stopped short of guilt, or by deep repentance atoned for it."

"Another sin, also, presses heavily on my soul. Regardless of your wise counsel, I closed my eyes to the good qualities of him I wedded; and, viewing his weaknesses through the medium of prejudice, exaggerated every defect, instead of, by affectionate kindness, endeavouring to amend them. He was not harsh, or unkind; even my coldness he bore with patience; and who knows, if I had evinced a better feeling towards him, whether he might not have become a more worthy and rational being?

"Had I avoided the society of him for whom I felt this engrossing, this culpable sentiment, the moment I had discovered my weakness, I should not have given room to the disgraceful suspicions that have for ever sullied

my fame. But, no—I courted danger; and, heedless of my reputation, and of the peace of mind of those to whom I was dear, I continued to receive his daily visits; and have now nothing to oppose to the charges which appearances furnished by my folly justify, except assertions of innocence, which those only who love me will credit. Think of the ignominy of a public trial! All the odious, the revolting disclosures of domestic privacy, thus laid open to the coarse and the vicious, who are but too prone to believe the worst. To have one's name made a by-word—a mockery—a shame! Oh, Mary! what woman could bear this degradation, and live?"

"But you, dearest, are innocent, and your innocence will be made manifest to the world."

"Could that innocence be questioned, Mary, if I had not encouraged habits of intimacy, which, now that I calmly look back

and reflect on, were too decided and too conspicuous not to originate suspicions derogatory to my honour? What would, or what could be thought, when it becomes known that I, every day, spent whole hours in his society, frequently quite alone? No acquittal, could I hope for one, could console me for the appearances of guilt which my own imprudence has created; and I feel that, in thus disregarding propriety, I have sinned against virtue, by furnishing cause for suspicion and evil example."

I tried, but in vain, to speak comfort to her; she is so impressed with a sense of the faultiness of her own conduct, to which alone she attributes all that has occurred, that it is impossible to console her. What a wife would this dear creature have made, had she fallen into good hands! When I think of her youth (she is not yet seventeen), and see the delicacy

and purity of her mind, the freedom from all rancorous passions,—evinced by her entire abstinence from any condemnation of the husband who proved so unfit a guardian for the treasure confided to him,—and the severity with which she judges her own conduct, I cannot repress the bitter feelings that arise in my breast.

The action is already commenced, and of this she was apprised by a statement in one of the papers so cruelly sent to her. I tremble for its effect on her in her present weak state. Lord and Lady Vernon are nearly stunned by the weight of this heavy blow; for their very existence seems bound up in their child.

Adieu, my beloved! Ever your own

MARY.

MISS MONTRESSOR TO LA MARQUISE DE VILLEROI.

My reception from my aunt was as disagreeable as I anticipated, *ma chère amie*. She suspects that there is some hidden motive for my return, and has assailed me with a thousand questions. When she learns the cause, she will be furious; for she always seems prepared to judge me as unfavourably as possible on every occasion, and loves Augusta so much, that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to persuade her that *she* could do, nay, dream of, wrong.

I asked Augusta to write to me, but she has not yet complied with my request: I have a fearful presentiment that she is ill; and this apprehension haunts me so continually, that there are moments when I would

give worlds that I had never interfered in her ill-assorted marriage, or plotted for its annulment. I have heard from Lord Annandale, who says he has put all *en train* for the action. I threw his letter from me with dislike and contempt; yet it is to wed this man that I have stooped to destroy the reputation, perhaps the peace of mind, of one of the most faultless of her sex! And yet, how far less unworthy is he than am I! for he is the dupe of my vile artifice, and knows not that his wronged wife is innocent. We are strange creatures; for I, who have the heart and head to plot against Augusta, have not the courage to contemplate the possible results of my scheme. Should she continue as wretched as when I saw her, or should she die —— But I will not, dare not, anticipate so fearful a catastrophe — a catastrophe that would preclude me from ever again knowing a moment's peace.

I am become strangely nervous of late; my sleep, too, is troubled by dreams, all of which have Augusta for their object. I see her ever, with that pale, but beautiful face, which reproaches me for having wronged her. A thousand recollections of her affection and confidence rise up to upbraid me; but, above all, the memory of the noble manner in which she received my assertion of innocence of the charge, but too well founded, of my first and fatal error.

Now that the hope, which has hitherto cheered me, of eventually securing her happiness in a union with Lord Nottingham, has disappeared, the consciousness of the atrocity of my guilty scheme weighs heavily on my mind. Would to Heaven I had never entered on it! Too late I feel that I did not comprehend this pure-minded woman: I believed her, like too many of those we have known, incap-

able of resisting the dangerous ordeal of love. But even this almost omnipotent passion she has partly vanquished; for the sentiment, in her, partook of the purity that characterises her so peculiarly; and, though she could not entirely extirpate it, yet it could not pervert her noble nature.

Yes, I now begin to be aware that virtue and passionate love may abide together in the female heart; and that those who, like me, have been doubtful of the existence of the union, only because they had been too stubbornly blind to observe it, may live to discover and deplore the pernicious fallacy of their system. I look back on the days of my early youth with horror, stained with one degrading crime, the consciousness of which has blighted every hope, and rendered torpid every virtue. All my thoughts addressed to the concealment, instead of being directed to the correction, of

errors, how have I strayed from the path of truth and peace! Yes, I cannot disguise from myself that I am despicable; and to you alone, who have been a witness, nay, a partaker, of the sins of my early youth, dare I draw aside the dark veil that shrouds them from others, and relieve my oppressed heart by the disclosure of its torments.

How could I live in intercourse with Augusta for months without discerning the delicacy and purity of her mind! Fool, fool that I was, to imagine that the power of bestowing her hand where I know her heart is placed, would console her for the loss of fame! Many — too many women would be so consoled, but she is not of them; and I am sensible, too late, that I have, by my wicked, my inhuman scheme, destroyed her peace of mind for ever.

A letter has just been given to me: its contents have almost made me expire with

horror. Fancy my feelings, Delphine, when I tell you that the artful and vicious man who betrayed me in early youth, and who has avoided me ever since — he who, not content with triumphing over my virtue, exposed my infatuation and shame—is now in England! yes, even here, within a short distance — poor, degraded, and desperate. All that Florestan had heard of his ruin is but too true. He has spent the whole of his small fortune, and has exhausted all resources except the infamous one he now adopts, of compelling me to marry him, under pain of disclosing all to my aunt, and to the world. He has ascertained that my aunt is rich, and that I am considered heiress to her wealth. This is his inducement to his present plan; and I know too well of what he is capable to doubt his putting his threat into execution. What am I to do? where turn for support in this fearful dilemma? He says

he will arrive at the post-town nearest this to-morrow; and that, if I do not meet him, he will directly seek my aunt, and inform her of all his rights over me.

Oh, Heavens! what is to become of me? who will, who can, protect me from this unprincipled, ruthless being? How I shudder at the thoughts of beholding him, knowing how wholly I am in his power! I am overpowered by terror, and feel a faintness that compels me to leave this unfinished.

Delphine, I have seen this man, and loathe him as never mortal loathed another. Yes, I abhor him and despise myself — oh, how immeasurably! — that I could ever have liked such a wretch. The long years that have elapsed since I knew him, he has evidently passed in a career of vice and profligacy, that has rendered him as hideous and disgusting

as he was once the reverse. His manners, too, have fallen with his fortunes; for they are low and brutal beyond any that I ever witnessed, and he appears to be reduced to the most extreme poverty. Such was his attire, that I trembled at being seen by any of the peasants in the vicinity conversing with him.

We met in a retired lane outside the park-wall — a place of rendezvous that he indicated to me in a note, soon after his arrival, when he had reconnoitred the precincts of this abode. The person who brought his letter told the footman, that he believed it was a petition from a poor foreigner in distress. Luckily I was alone when it was given me; for had my aunt been present, her suspicious eyes would have detected my emotion. I stole to the appointed place like a culprit, and there I found him. Oh, Delphine, had you seen him! — his face bloated and flushed from the

effects of intemperance; his figure attired in a suit of tawdry and threadbare clothes, yet still aiming at fashion; his whole air resembling Frederick le Maitre in *Robert Macaire*. A gilt chain was drawn conspicuously through the button-holes of a showy, but soiled waistcoat; an old hat on one side of his tangled locks; and a cigar in his mouth: but to the expression of his countenance there is no doing justice. The mixture of cunning and reckless daring — oh, it was fearful!

He addressed me in a tone of easy familiarity, calling me his *bonne amie*, his *chère* Caroline. "Time," said he, "has dealt more leniently by you, Caroline, than by me; for play, infernal play! tries faces as well as purses; and both, *sacre Dieu!* have suffered with me. But you appear cold, reserved — not glad to see me. How is this? Come, come, *ma belle*, we must be better friends; for

I am, as you know, a sort of husband, and, as such, entitled to certain privileges:" and the wretch positively attempted to embrace me. Oh, God! the degradation of that moment punished half the evil actions of my life.

"Stand back!" I exclaimed, hoarsely, half choked by indignation.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he said, "*mademoiselle* seems disposed to act *la fière;*" and he burst into a contemptuous laugh: "it is a pity that she was not always so prudish. But let that pass: I am not come here to play the lover; such mummery was well enough when *mademoiselle* was younger, and better worth the trouble—but now it is different. The years that have elapsed since we parted (for you, like myself, are not in your *première jeunesse*, though, *en verité, très bien conservée*) have mended *your* position, and injured *mine*. You are the heiress of a rich aunt; I am the heir of naught but what the

gaming-table has left me, which consists of but a few shillings: for Fortune is even more fickle than your sex, and has played me more scurvy tricks than all womankind put together. England is not the place to live in without money; and, as I mean to live, money I must have: I have, therefore, determined to render a tardy justice to your honour by espousing you, and to act the affectionate nephew to your aunt, do the honours of her *triste château*, turn *chasseur*, *fermier*, *gentilhomme Anglais*, *et bon père*, *peut-être*, *par-dessus le marché*."

I listened to him, nearly overpowered by disgust and horror; for his words were accompanied by a coarseness of gesture, and reckless impudence of manner, that appertain only to the lowest and vilest of men. The word *crapulous* is the only one that can adequately describe his appearance.

"You have already exposed me," answered I; "for at Turin you basely betrayed my dishonour, without even concealing my name."

"Bah, bah! what of that?" replied he; "who could help boasting of such a *bonne fortune?*"

To remonstrate with so utterly unworthy a person I felt would be useless; consequently, I continued to listen to his proposals until he had concluded, wishing that the earth might open and ingulf him, or hide me from his sight for ever.

"What you propose," replied I, "is too absurd to merit a reply. I would prefer exposure, disgrace — ay, even death itself, to a marriage with you!" and I looked the contempt I felt.

"*Mademoiselle* is not complimentary; but the English are rarely polite, and her *séjour* in her native land has somewhat impaired the

tone *de bonne compagnie* that used to distinguish her when she desired nothing so much as a union with her humble servant (bowing mockingly). Your affection, *mademoiselle*, it would be ungrateful to doubt, after the proofs of it with which you formerly honoured me. I am still the same man on whom you bestowed your heart, and the very pretty person that enshrined it, at Florence, some twelve years ago. The only difference is, that I am twelve years older (and this misfortune you share with me in common), and that my wardrobe is less *recherché*, an inconvenience which is easily remedied. Some of your aunt's gold will soon metamorphose me into *un élégant;* and we shall, I flatter myself, make a very good-looking couple, even though we are *un peu passés*."

"I warn you," said I, "that, if you present yourself before my aunt, she will consign you to the police."

"She will do no such thing," answered he, coolly; "for I have with me all the tender billets with which you favoured me in former days—billets which furnish such incontestable proofs of your *tendresse*, and the extent to which it led you, that I do not think an English prude would particularly like the infamy which the exposure of them would obtain for you. To preserve the reputation and the honour of her family unimpaired, your aunt will be disposed to grant me a *legal* right to the charms which her niece less ceremoniously yielded to me. The reason of my first seeking this interview with you was from a desire of sparing your feelings as much as possible. I want you to furnish me with a sufficient sum of money to enable me to come here in a manner becoming my birth, and your future husband. I shall, provided you do so, demand your hand, without making

madame votre tante au fait of our having anticipated her consent some twelve years ago. I will plead the force of a long attachment; and you will, with *maidenly reserve*, acknowledge that your happiness depends on becoming my wife. She, like a good aunt, will yield to our wishes; you will be made an honest woman, and I a happy husband, *sans doute*. Refuse compliance with this proposal, and I swear that I will see your aunt in my present guise, declare the position in which we stood to each other, and inform her of my intention of giving publicity to my right over you, unless she agrees to purchase my silence by the gift of half her fortune."

The craft, the audacity, and the villany of this hardened wretch, are, as you see, matchless. I am caught in his toils; and escape is, I fear, hopeless.

"You are, perhaps, not aware," said I,

" that my aunt's fortune, which is not by any means large, is not entailed upon me, and that she may leave it to whom she likes."

" Yes, yes, I know all that," replied he; " I have made my inquiries."

" My aunt is far from being a fond one, as you seem to imagine, and would neither yield assent to my marrying you, unless you possessed a suitable fortune, nor consent to buy your silence at the price you name."

" We shall see, we shall see," answered he; and he turned in the direction of the park, leaving me transfixed with horror.

I called him back, almost maddened with the contending emotions of fear, shame, and hatred. Oh, God! Delphine, what were then my feelings — what are they now! I asked him to grant me a few hours to reflect; and he yielded to my entreaty with the air of a man who makes a sacrifice.

"*En attendant, ma chère,*" said he, "I want money."

I gave him the contents of my purse, consisting of a trifle only, at which he glanced contemptuously; observing, that it would scarcely furnish a copious repast and bed, of which he stood greatly in need. While he was secreting the money, I saw the handle of a poniard glittering in his breast; and I absolutely shuddered as I remarked the assassin-like scowl of his brow, which indicated no reluctance to use this concealed weapon. He noticed my agitation, and smiled.

"What! you are alarmed at this?" said he, drawing forth the dagger. "I never go without it; it has stood my friend more than once in times of need: but do not be frightened, it wages no war with women"—and he replaced it—"though at one period, I flatter myself, and *you* seemed to be of my opinion, that I was a lady-killer: *mais tout celà est fini*

à présent; et la seule dame que j'aime actuellement est la dame Fortune, qui est, entre nous soit dit, la seule qui m'ait résisté."

To have returned to the house for all the money that my desk contains, leaving him to loiter about the lane, would have exposed me to the risk of observation; and to have sent the money to him by a servant, would have been nearly as dangerous. He has, therefore, proposed coming to-night, after all are in bed, when I am to give it to him from the window of the state dressing-room, which, fortunately, opens into the park.

What am I to do? Oh! I would give worlds to be near you at this moment; to have your advice, and the protection of your husband, to shield me from this miscreant. He is quite capable of fulfilling all his menaces; and my aunt is so rigid, that she never would forgive me were she to know what he threatens

to relate. I can write no more; my head is confused, and my heart is faint. Why, why did my evil destiny throw me into the power of this wretch?

I felt so overpowered during the whole evening by the interview of the morning, and the anticipation of that of the night, that my aunt, who seldom shews much interest about me, asked, with unusual kindness, whether I was unwell, and suggested different remedies for my alleged complaints. Touched by her kindness, I was almost on the point of throwing myself at her feet, and confessing the fatal error of my youth, and its consequences, when the newspapers were brought in. On what trifles does the happiness or misery of life sometimes hang! Half an hour later, and I could have had courage to reveal to her the fearful position in which I am placed. I would have implored her to send me away

out of England — any where — to avoid this hated wretch; and she seemed so much more kindly disposed towards me, that she might have taken pity on my despair: but she had no sooner glanced over the papers, than her whole countenance changed, from its recent expression of kindness, to one of scrutinising curiosity and stern severity.

"Now is the cause of your return explained," said she; "as, also, why you appear so pale and agitated. Why did you not tell me that Lady Annandale was driven with ignominy from her husband's home? Yes, I see the cause; the very day you left London! You must have been privy to this disgraceful catastrophe! Who knows how far your evil influence and counsel may have led to it? for she was pure and guileless as an angel when she left her father's roof. Caroline, if you have had aught to do in this affair, may God forgive you, but *I* never

will. You, who are so many years her senior, who have had such a knowledge of society and its dangers—why was it that you did not prevent this catastrophe? Yes, it will break the heart of her excellent parents to have dishonour stamped on their child!" and here my aunt burst into tears. "And, now I remember," she resumed, looking at me with sternness, "how came it, that you yesterday received a letter franked by Lord Annandale? Are you so unfeeling, so faithless a friend, as to maintain a correspondence with the husband who drives Augusta from his house? for it is plain the letter could not be from her. Caroline, I have sometimes accused myself of judging you too harshly. Your irreligion, your levity, and want of womanly reserve, gave me a very bad opinion of you; but I never thought you capable of deserting your friend the moment that she most required the consolation

of your presence, or of keeping up a correspondence with the husband who has denounced her."

I attempted to explain, that, as she went to her father's, I thought it best to come home.

"Then you judged her guilty of the crime with which she is charged?"

I tried to answer an assent; but I could not utter the falsehood.

"How was it possible for her to be culpable even in appearance (for that she is so in reality no person shall ever make me believe)," pursued my aunt, "without your having perceived some impropriety of manner? And when you had perceived, why not have remonstrated and advised? If neither advice nor remonstrance availed, why not have left her house ere she herself was expelled from it? All this mystery must be explained, Caroline; and I warn you,

that, unless the explanation proves more satisfactory than I anticipate it will, you will find me a severe judge, and an implacable guardian. I loved Augusta Vernon from her birth, and would have preferred hearing that she was dead to having her name thus dishonoured."

So saying, my aunt rose from her chair and retired to her own room, leaving me overwhelmed with confusion and dread. I withdrew to my chamber, where I am now writing in a state of trepidation I have never before experienced. The great clock in the hall has tolled twelve. It seemed, to my excited feelings, to have a funeral sound; and I almost wished it was my knell, as even death would have been a relief in my present horrible position. The money I possess, not above twenty pounds, is wholly inadequate to procure even a temporary forbearance from my evil genius. The sale of all the trinkets I have would not

produce a sum sufficient to satisfy his rapacity. What, what will become of me? Hark! I hear the signal — *he* is at the window!

I descended to the state dressing-room, opened the casement in fear and trembling, and offered to hand him the money; but he thrust it aside: "What," said he, "do you treat me as a mendicant? — *me*, who hold your reputation, your position even in this dwelling, in my hands? I must, and will enter the house — I have much to say to you."

"Say it where you are!" I exclaimed; "for into the house you cannot, must not come."

"We shall see," he replied, and vaulted into the window, pushing me from it and closing it down.

I shook so violently that I could with difficulty support myself — my terror of him suggesting a thousand fearful thoughts.

"Who would believe," said he, looking at me with an expression of mingled mockery and malice almost demoniacal, "that we two have been lovers; that we have met in rapture, and parted with regret? Who would imagine that the woman I see cowering and trembling before me, with averted eye and blanched cheek, has smiled with delight, and blushed love's own rosy hue, when I have approached her? Such are the metamorphoses wrought by time and circumstances; and I — yes, even I — could be sad as I note them. But I am a philosopher, and only laugh at what occasions tears to others;" and he laughed in a sort that caused my blood to chill.

"Do not make a noise, I implore you," said I; "for my aunt sleeps in the next room."

"And now to business," he rejoined, without noticing my appeal. I handed him the money, which he eyed contemptuously, but, neverthe-

less, put it in his pocket; and, doing so, again I saw the handle of his poniard peeping forth, and shuddered at the thoughts it excited.

"Is this all your wealth?" asked he.

I answered in the affirmative.

"Why, what a stingy old animal your aunt must be! I shall make her more liberal, you may be sure. It is devilish cold here, *ma belle!*" resumed he: "no wonder you tremble; for even I, who am used to be less delicately lodged, am half frozen."

As he thus spoke, he took from his pocket a leathern bottle, filled with some spirit, the odour of which was detestable, and emptied nearly half the contents of it into his mouth.

"I have discovered," he continued, "at the village alehouse, where I lodge, that your statement is correct as to your aunt's fortune not being settled on you—nay, more, it is said that she does not appear to feel any strong

predilection in your favour. There is no accounting for tastes, you know: every one may not admire you as much as your humble servant once did — nay, still does; for, *en verité*, you are still a monstrous fine woman."

How I loathed him!

"Now, as her fortune is wholly in her own power, she might take it into her head to bequeath it to some one less likely to do honour to it than we are; and to drag on some tedious years in pleasing a stupid old woman, who, after all, may cheat one at last, is a *triste* affair. I know something of this sort of existence, for I tried it once. An old uncle, rich as Crœsus, *bête comme un Anglais*, and capricious as a Parisian *belle*, took me to live with him as his adopted heir, at his old *château* near Turin. He kept an execrable cook, gave me bad wine and good advice, until I could stomach neither any longer; consequently, took

French leave of him one night, disembarrassing him of all the money in his *coffre fort;* a good round sum, too, by Jove! But he, stupid old dolt, chose to resent this little *escapade* of mine as a heinous offence; and, when he shortly afterwards died, left his fortune to another nephew, who could swallow bad dinners and good advice without murmuring, and prefer waiting patiently for a large fortune to anticipating a portion of it."

While he recounted this anecdote of himself, he was glancing round at the various articles of plate and furniture in the room.

"Every thing here indicates wealth," said he: "that silver-framed mirror, this silver basin and ewer, and the *nécessaire,*" taking one of the large old-fashioned boxes from the *toilette,* and weighing it in his hand. "Do you know that there is a little fortune in this ap-

partment? Your aunt has, doubtless, diamonds of value?"

A vague dread that this question was only the prelude to some proposal of theft, induced me to answer in the negative.

"What! would you have me believe that the owner of the costly things before me has no diamonds? Bah! I know better; you are disingenuous, Caroline. Ye gods, how thirsty I am!" pursued he, having again recourse to his bottle; "it is the infernal bacon I partook of, by way of a supper, that has produced this insatiable thirst. *Apropos de souper*, how can you, *ma belle*, who have lived in civilised countries, exist on English cookery? Faugh! the recollection of it makes me sick! *Mais, revenons à nos affaires.* What do you intend? How are you to procure a sufficient supply of money to place me at my ease, and prevent

the necessity of my exposing you to your aunt! I really have no malice against you, *ma chère;* and, if I am compelled to any hostile measure, poverty alone will be the cause."

I told him that, except a few trinkets, all of which were at his service, I had nothing that could produce money.

"Where are they? let me see them," replied he.

"They are in my bed-room, above stairs."

"Go for them: why do you hesitate?"

I dared not tell him what was then passing in my mind, but he divined it.

"You are afraid to leave me here with these costly things," said he, pointing to the rich toilette-service; "but I am ready to attend you to your bed-room, if you prefer this alternative:" and this was uttered with a glance that made me shudder.

I instantly took a light, and glided with

stealthy steps along the corridor, and up the stairs, leaving him in the dressing-room below. It was several minutes before I could find the key of my jewel-case; and when I did, in my trepidation, I could not open it for as many more. At length, having placed the trinkets in a large silk reticule, I left my chamber, but had only advanced a few paces when I heard a noise. I returned in terror to my room and locked the door, convinced that some one had detected the nocturnal visitor below. I listened in breathless terror; but, finding all continue quiet, I again stole down stairs, and found him where I had left him, but with a face nearly as pale as my own, and nearly equally embarrassed in manner.

"Did you hear a noise?" asked he, eagerly.

I answered in the affirmative.

"What could it be?" demanded he, eyeing me scrutinisingly.

Having ascertained that I was ignorant of the cause, he hastily added,—

"I think I had better depart; there may be danger in remaining longer."

"But you have not seen the trinkets for which you sent me," said I.

"True, true," he replied; "where are they?"

I delivered to him the silk bag that contained them, which he snatched, saying,—

"I will examine them another time, but now I am in a hurry. Adieu, Caroline!"

"What are your plans?" I asked, in fear and trembling. "Do not, I entreat you, send any more notes here from the alehouse: a repetition of such a course must excite suspicion; and my aunt is already but too much disposed to think harshly of me."

"She will think harshly of you no more,"

said he, and a change was visible in his countenance; "for I will never betray you to her."

"Promise me this!" I eagerly exclaimed.

"I promise you," he answered; and there was a wildness and strangeness in his countenance that I had never before seen it wear.

"I must go," resumed he, hurriedly; and he opened the casement and disappeared.

An oppressive weight seemed removed from my breast when I again found myself alone. I examined all the room; for, to say the truth, I suspected that the visible change and trepidation of his manner arose from his having purloined some of the articles of massive silver which he seemed to examine with such longing eyes. I was the more inclined to this suspicion from having heard a noise, resembling that produced by the closing of a window, when returning to the chamber, which

led me to infer that he had placed something on the outside of it.

All remained, however, as I had left it; and it was a relief to me to find that he was not quite so base as I had suspected him to be. Having carefully fastened the shutters of the window, I stole back to my room; where, feeling too much agitated to hope for sleep, I have employed the rest of the night in detailing to you my nocturnal interview with this fearful man. What have I not still to dread from him! for I put no faith in his promises. The moment he has expended the scanty sum I have given him, and the amount of what the trinkets may produce, he will return here to denounce me to my aunt, from whose severity I can hope for no mercy.

It is strange what could have so changed his whole appearance and manner, while I was absent from the chamber. It could not have

been above half an hour altogether. I left him half intoxicated and reckless, impatient for the trinkets I offered him; and I found him pale as death, perfectly sobered, nearly as nervous as myself, and seeming to have quite forgotten the trinkets he had been so anxious to obtain! Could it be that any supernatural appearance produced this visible change? I feel a dread steal over me even at the supposition. Merciful Providence, if such things are possible! But let me conquer these painful creations of a distempered fancy.

Perhaps it was remorse for the infamous conduct he was pursuing towards me that struck some chord in his heart, and led to the change I observed. If so, and it operate to procure me a cessation of his visits and letters, I shall forgive him all the misery he has caused me within the last few hours — and bitter has it been. Oh! Delphine, could you

but see him as he is now—ruined, degraded, and steeped in vice of the lowest, the most disgusting kind; bearing in his flushed and swollen countenance the impress of habitual intoxication and brutal passions—how would you pity me at being condemned to associate with such a being even for a minute, and be treated by him on terms of perfect equality! When I saw myself in the power of this man, alone, and in the dead of night, a sickening sense of terror crept through my veins. Robbery, even murder, seemed possible, as I looked at his scowling and ferocious brow; but, dreadful as was this apprehension, it was feeble to that of his attempting any personal familiarity, to which death, in its most terrific shape, would have been preferable.

Oh! it is only when vice is thus unveiled before us in all its hideous deformity that we are struck with terror at the monster. We saw

this man when youth and fashion rendered him more attractive than most of those who are now basking in the sunshine of favour with the giddy and unthinking of our sex. The germes of all the vices that have since ripened in his heart then existed; but they were concealed beneath the varnish of personal refinement. The uncontrolled indulgence of his passions, and an utter selfishness, that rendered him regardless of their consequences to others, have brought this once gay and brilliant being to the lowest degradation; and those who could smile at the vices of the fashionable sensualist turn with horror from the crude, undisguised, and unmitigated ruffian.

But is it for me to moralise on the crimes of others?—I, who have plotted to destroy the virtue of the purest of her sex; and, finding it immaculate, descended to the basest arts to compromise her reputation! Augusta, you are

avenged! for, though bowed down by sorrow, your innocent breast will never know a pang to be compared with the fierce ones inflicted by remorse.

Could I but once find myself freed from a life of dependence on my aunt, and in possession of a home and station in society, the rest of my life should be passed in the exercise of those virtues, the existence of which I have hitherto disbelieved, and the practice of which I have ever neglected. My views, opinions, feelings—all are changed. The veil that has heretofore obscured my vision has fallen for ever; and I loathe the vices, however sanctioned by social convention, which I used to regard with such indulgence — nay, which I have so deeply shared.

Fatigue oppresses me, and the light of day has dimmed that of my expiring candle. Adieu!

Pity me, Delphine! I am distracted — yet not sufficiently so to lose, for a moment, the sense of my misery. My aunt, my noble-minded aunt, was found dead in her bed this morning — murdered! — her jewels stolen — her escritoire rifled! Can you not divine by whom? And *I* — *I* am the depository of this terrible, this fatal secret! *I* it was who let the assassin enter! I it was who told him where she slept! I it was who, by my absence, gave him the opportunity of committing this fearful deed; and I it was who secured the shutters of the window by which he retreated, thus fixing on some innocent person the suspicion of a guilt, the perpetrator of which I alone know! Oh, God! oh, God! I shall go mad!

I was awakened from a feverish slumber by repeated knocks at my door. Having started from my bed to open it, my maid stood before me in breathless horror.

"Your aunt is dead — murdered, mademoiselle!" uttered she: "oh, mercy! what will become of us all?"

An instant conviction of who the murderer was, shot, like lightning, through my brain; and I fell fainting from the chair into which I had dropped a moment before. I must have continued insensible for a considerable time; for, on returning to a consciousness of my state, I found that I had been bled, and the family physician was exhorting those around me to be quiet.

"Is she, indeed, quite dead?" demanded I; "and have all means been tried to restore her?"

The doctor shook his head, and entreated me to be composed; but I was not to be silenced. Finding me obstinate, he told me that, on going to her room at the usual hour, her attendant found her mistress' room in

great confusion: the drawers forced open and rifled of their valuable contents; her escritoire broken, and a large sum of money which it had contained gone; and my poor, poor aunt a lifeless corse, having been suffocated by means of a pillow, which was bound tightly around her face.

Her dying struggles then, Delphine, were the noise I heard: and even then, had I descended, it might not have been too late to save her. But, selfish as I was, I thought only of the danger which threatened myself by a discovery of that monster in the house, and left my poor helpless aunt to be his victim. Now are the change in his looks and manner, his carelessness of my trinkets, and his impatience to depart, all explained: now do I too well comprehend the words he uttered—"She will think harshly of you no more;" "I will never betray you to her." Oh,

Almighty Powers! thus was I parleying with the assassin of my poor aunt, who was, perhaps, at that moment rendering her last sigh!

Am I not as culpable as the wretch whose murderous hands committed the foul deed? Without my aid, he never could have gained access to the house, which is so strongly secured as to defy danger. Surrounded by attached and faithful servants, she slumbered in safety until I gave entrance to her murderer, and, as it were, wilfully guided him to her chamber. I see her ever before me, struggling and writhing beneath his grasp; I hear her dying cry ever ringing in my ears; and the ruthless monster stands ever confronting me with that malignant and fearful scowl which his countenance wore last night.

I sometimes think I am growing mad, and tremble with new dread, lest I should unconsciously utter something that may betray the

fatal secret: at other moments I am strongly tempted to denounce the assassin; but how do so without betraying the mode in which he gained ingress to the house, and whom it was that secured the window after his retreat? No, I have not courage to meet the punishment I so fully merit; and this fell secret must remain for ever buried in my breast.

The house is filled with magistrates and police. Several of the servants are arrested on suspicion: is not this, too, dreadful? And *I*, who, with a word, could exculpate the innocent, must not, dare not, utter that word!

Yes! the pangs I now endure must surely be a foretaste of that future punishment awarded to the guilty; and conscience whispers that I merit it all. Would I were in my grave! Yet, if beyond the grave, — as all I now feel too surely proves, — the sense of our crimes, and

their heavy penalty, await us, what hope have I of the oblivion I would seek?

Such is the weakness to which my frame is reduced that I can scarcely move: violent pains in my head, and an aching of all my limbs, announce some serious malady. I will despatch this while I have yet strength to close it; perhaps it is the last you will receive from the wretched CAROLINE.

THE COUNTESS OF DELAWARD TO THE EARL OF DELAWARD.

How does it pain me, my beloved, not to be able to give you better tidings of my poor friend, knowing, as I do, the warm interest you feel in her; and knowing, also, how much

you have need of consolation at present, with a dear relative in a state that admits not of the hope of his valuable life being prolonged many days. Alas ! poor Augusta's condition is nearly as hopeless ; her languor every hour increasing, and her form wasted nearly to that of a shadow. No complaint, no murmur, escapes her dear lips ; there is something more approaching to the idea we form of angelic natures in this lovely creature, than I ever before witnessed. Her beauty is positively radiant, but it is unlike the beauty of earth. Passion has left no trace on her polished brow ; and patience and meekness are depicted on every lineament of her lovely face. In gazing on her angelic calmness, it seems cruel to wish her life prolonged ; because it is impossible not to see, that this serenity is owing to her conviction that her recovery is hopeless.

When I have endeavoured to lead her mind

to the prospect of recovery, she has answered me,—

"Do not wish it, dearest friend: with a stained name, how could I ever again know peace? My Heavenly Father, who alone is fully aware of the extent of my weakness, while pardoning that, will judge me more leniently than men; and in the grave I shall not meet the eye of scorn, nor have to shrink from the contempt of those who are too willing to believe all that malice can invent, or scandal propagate. The woman who has lost her honour should live to atone for her crime; but for her who has lost her reputation there is no refuge but death."

When I think of this creature, now a breathing shadow before me, as she was a few brief months ago in the flower of youth and health, I turn with loathing from the corruption of the heartless and artificial society,

among whose rocks and shallows her peace has been wrecked. The only desire she manifests is to leave London, though her physicians think that she has not sufficient strength to bear the journey, however slowly performed; but she evinces such anxiety to undertake it, that her unhappy father and mother intend to suffer her to make the effort. A *dormeuse*, with additional springs, is preparing for her; and I trust that she will thus be able to reach the home of her childhood.

A strong sense of religion appears to have arisen in the mind of my poor dear Augusta; and its tranquillising effects are visible in all she says or does. It seems as though she considers the trials that have overtaken her as an atonement for her errors, and, as such, she shrinks not from enduring them; displaying a patience and resignation as touching as it is edifying.

Intelligence has just reached us of the death of poor Mrs. Wickenham, under the most harrowing circumstances: but as, doubtless, the papers will have apprised you of the dreadful event, I shall add no more. Lord and Lady Vernon are greatly afflicted by the appalling occurrence; but we carefully conceal it from poor Augusta.

That ill-directed, and, I fear, wicked person, Miss Montressor, will now be left free from all restraint, and will be likely to make an improper use of her lately acquired liberty. Strong as is my antipathy towards her, I cannot help pitying her present forlorn and unprotected state; and I hope her aunt has, at least, secured her a provision.

I shall accompany Augusta to the country, and think it likely we may set out in a couple of days. We shall make very short stages. How I long to see you again, my beloved!

and to assure you, once more, *vivâ voce*, how entirely and fondly I am your own

MARY.

MISS MONTRESSOR TO LA MARQUISE DE VILLEROI.

SINCE I last wrote to you, *chère* Delphine, I have approached the gates of death. Would that I had entered them, instead of waking to life, with all the consciousness of intolerable and interminable misery. A violent fever assailed me soon after I despatched my last letter to you; and, during three weeks, I have been insensible to all around me. The most terrific visions haunted my excited imagination during that epoch. My murdered aunt seemed continually to stand before me, with

her face swollen and distorted by the assassin's grasp. The grisly ruffian, himself, too, was ever present; either dragging me to the altar, where grinning fiends officiated, or on the point of hurling me from some stupendous rock into the angry abyss of waters that yawned to drown me. Augusta—the wronged, the innocent Augusta — robed in white, interposed to save me; but the grim murderer, with a demoniac laugh, plunged a dagger in her heart.

Such were the dreadful phantoms that, during three long and dreary weeks, haunted my disordered mind, with a vividness so terrific, that even now I shudder at the bare recollection, and fear to sleep, lest they should return to appal me.

The steward of my aunt has been arrested, and thrown into prison, on suspicion of the murder. He, it seems, had paid into her

hands a large sum of money the day before this fatal event, the whole of which had disappeared, with her diamonds; and, as her possession of this sum was known only to himself, and that he slept in the house the night of the murder, he is, consequently, suspected, and viewed with abhorrence by all the neighbourhood. *He* is to stand his trial; and *I*—*I*, who alone could prove his innocence, must not dare to justify him. Is not this compulsory acquiescence, which may terminate in another murder, too, too dreadful? and where will end the painful consequences of my crimes?

The clergyman of the parish has been repeatedly to see me; for, my despair and illness have led those around me to attribute to grief the sufferings which are produced by horror and remorse. Consequently, I have met with a sympathy and kindness which I do not merit; and which those who evince it would

shrink with dismay from bestowing, did they but dream of the horrific truth.

It appears, that, on that fatal and never to be forgotten night, my poor aunt, impressed with a but too just presentiment of my falseness to Augusta, whom she so tenderly loved, added a codicil to her will, by which she revoked the bequest of her fortune to me; and left me only two thousand pounds, vested in the funds, to be laid out in the purchase of an annuity for me. Even this circumstance has increased the sympathy and kindness of her friends and neighbours for me, —so that I find myself well treated by all. How little do I deserve it!

I have found two or three letters from Lord Annandale, that arrived here during my illness. He tells me that the action is advancing; though the pretended illness of Lady Annandale was put forward by some of

her friends as a motive for retarding it. Good heavens! if she should be really ill! If I have this calamity, also, to answer for! It is — it must be so; were she not ill, she surely would have written to me, unknowing, as she still must be, of the odious, the wicked part I have taken in wounding her peace, and destroying her reputation. My mind is in a fearful state: I dare not anticipate the future — and I shudder at the past.

Here I cannot long remain; for a relative of my aunt, to whom she has bequeathed this place, will soon arrive to take possession of it, when I, of course, must depart. Had I inherited my aunt's fortune, I do believe that I should still have had the grace to have rendered justice to Augusta, by declaring to Lord Annandale the base and treacherous part I have acted towards her, and thus have stopped all legal proceedings against her; for I could then

have retired to France or Italy, to live in affluence and liberty, without depending, as I now must, on a marriage with Lord Annandale, which is my sole and last resource for securing that wealth and station, for the possession of which I have bartered my hopes of peace here, and pardon hereafter. Had I been born with the riches and rank for which, from my earliest youth, I have pined, I might have passed through life unstained by crime; for I am not worse disposed than the generality of my fellow-mortals: but the want of these, and the ungovernable desire to possess them, have plunged me in guilt too deep ever now to be expiated.

I sometimes endeavour to consider my recent transgressions as the result of the first crime which I perpetrated; and thus heap on the head of the vile wretch who incited me to it, the entire responsibleness of my subse-

quent career. But I cannot wholly cheat myself with this sophistry; for, conscience whispers but too distinctly, that it was not *he* who urged me to counsel a young and inexperienced girl, while yet a mere child, to contract a marriage, when she had discovered that she was even more than indifferent to him who sought her hand: or to plot, alas! too successfully, against her happiness and honour, when she, unsuspicious of my treachery, was prodigally lavishing on me all the affectionate kindness of her gentle and noble nature!

How dreadful, how appalling it is, to be fully conscious of one's crimes! to tremble at their consequences, and to loathe one's baseness, yet be compelled, by force of circumstances, to persevere in the career of guilt!

Would that I could delude myself into a blindness of my own wickedness; or that the remorse which consumes me could atone for

past, and preserve me from future crimes. I sometimes think I am mad, and almost wish I were; for any physical suffering or debasement would be preferable to the fearful state of mind in which I exist.

Lord Annandale's letters inflict a bitter pang. When he praises the delicacy of my conduct towards my guilty friend, as he unjustly styles poor Augusta, contrasting it with that of the Comtesse Hohenlinden's, and the other ladies of her *coterie*, which has disgusted him, think what I must — what I *do* feel! Were he to know the truth, how would he loathe and spurn me! for he is only weak, and not malignant, and fully believes the culpability of his wife, or never would he have denounced her. Should he not live to discover her innocence in this world, there is another, where all secrets stand revealed; and *there* she will appear pure as angels, while I — oh,

God! I dare not contemplate this dreadful retribution.

My head is so confused, that I know not whether I told you that, at the inquest after the tragical death of my aunt, the person keeping the alehouse, where that monster took up his abode, came forward and stated, that for two days before the murder, a foreigner, of most suspicious appearance, had lodged at his house. That, on the day of his arrival, he had sent me a letter, which they supposed to be a petition; and that, during the day, he had loitered in the immediate vicinity of the park. That, on the night of the murder, however, he had not left the house, having retired to bed early, and only departed at seven o'clock the next morning.

How well do I recollect his telling me that, fearing to excite suspicion, he had fastened his door on the inside, and quitted the chamber

by the window! It is harrowing to my feelings to hear my *femme de chambre* recount the belief entertained by the whole household and neighbourhood, of the guilt of poor Davenant, the steward; an old and faithful servant, who stood peculiarly high in the esteem of his mistress. What adds to the appearances against him is, that on him was found a pocket-book, known to be purchased by my unhappy aunt but a few days before, and containing a hundred pound bank-note, with a pearl hoop-ring, recognised to be hers, and known by her attendant to have been in her possession the morning previous to her death.

He declares that these articles were given to him by my aunt. His daughter being on the point of marriage, his mistress presented him with a hundred pounds to add to her nuptial portion, and a ring for the intended bride.

All this he has protested, and all this I too well know to be true; for my aunt named the gifts to me, with many commendations on his zeal and integrity in her service, when we were at coffee, the last evening of her life. But if I state this fact, may not suspicion fall on some one equally innocent? I know not which way to turn, nor what to resolve; but I sicken with horror at thinking that a second life may be the victim to the fatal position in which I find myself. Another circumstance that tells against this poor man is, that a considerable increase to the bequest already made him in my aunt's will was added in the codicil that terrible night. His unfortunate family are overwhelmed with despair: they alone believe him innocent; but those who have known and esteemed him for years, have already pronounced him guilty, and execrated his ingratitude and villany.

How awful, how inscrutable, are the ways of Providence! While this innocent man is in a prison, awaiting, perhaps, an ignominious death, the real criminal is wandering at liberty with his ill-acquired wealth! Does not all this seeming anomaly *prove* a future state of reward and punishment? Too surely it does; and dreadful will be the condition of those in *that* life, who escape their punishment in *this!*

Would that I had the certainty that the assassin was out of England; for, much as I loathe him, and desire that his atrocious crime should meet a condign retribution, I tremble at the idea of his being arrested in this country, as I am convinced that he would not hesitate to compromise my honour, if not my safety, by denouncing me in some way or other. Think of the horror, the degradation, of knowing that one's safety depends on such a wretch! Oh! it is too, too dreadful!

How different has been your fate to mine, Delphine! yet both equally sinned in our early youth. The consequences of that one false step, which has plunged me in the fearful position in which I now stand, have been comparatively harmless to you, because the partner of your indiscretion was not, as in my case, a villain. Yet had Villeroi been my lover instead of yours, my poverty would have opposed an impassable barrier between us. He would have left me as the other did, to brave all the consequences of my crime; but he would not have added insult to injury. Your wealth, your station, would always have rendered your lover anxious to become your husband; and thus, that sin which has led to my ruin, has had no evil influence on your brilliant destiny.

Forgive me for thus comparing our different fates; like a drowning wretch, who catches at straws, I try to cheat myself into a belief

that I am not quite so guilty as conscience tells me I am; but even this illusion is denied me; for too plainly does reason whisper, that to my own turpitude alone do I owe the pangs I endure, and the future I tremble to contemplate.

Adieu, Delphine! Pity your unfortunate friend, CAROLINE.

THE COUNTESS OF DELAWARD TO THE EARL OF DELAWARD.

You will, my beloved, I know, be desirous to learn how poor dear Augusta bore her first day's journey, and be delighted to hear that she has supported it wonderfully well. Her longing anxiety to get away from London, lent her, I do think, a factitious force, that has given birth to new hopes in the hearts of her

father and mother; hopes which a sad presentiment assures me will never be realised. She begged so earnestly that we might leave London very early in the morning, that, to comply with her wishes, we were in the carriage by seven o'clock. Only a very few persons, and these of the humblest class, were visible in Grosvenor Square, as she was placed in the *dormeuse*, propped up by pillows; but even from the glance of these she shrank with a dread that it was painful to behold.

I alone accompanied her in the *dormeuse;* Lord and Lady Vernon preceding us in their travelling-carriage, and Augusta's *femme de chambre* and mine following us in a post-chaise. She was silent, and absorbed in meditation. While we passed through the street, and immediate environs of London, she kept her eyes closed, as if to shut out their view, though the blinds had been let down at her

desire, as she betrays the most nervous susceptibility at encountering the gaze of a stranger. When we had traversed the environs, she opened her eyes, and said,—

"Now I can breathe more freely. I seem to have escaped from an atmosphere of humiliation and disgrace, where every eye mocked, and every tongue defamed me. Oh, Mary! you know not, and *you* never can know, the agonising consciousness of being the subject of general and disgraceful animadversion; of seeing caricatures portraying vice in its most hideous forms, stamped with your likeness; *bon mots* and equivoques the most contemptuous coupled with your outraged name; while the good deplore, and the wicked triumph, in your presumed criminality. All this *I* have felt and writhed under, until my tortured imagination has conjured the belief that the overwhelming sense of shame which was preying

on my soul, had fixed its burning brand on my brow. How — how I longed to be transported to some distant region, where my name had never been heard — my disgrace never been related; where I could again meet the glance of human beings without being crimsoned by the blush of shame. I was proud, Mary, too proud; — how has that pride been humbled! Will not every modest woman accuse me of bringing dishonour on my sex? Will not every immodest one cite me as a companion in vice? Think of a trial!"

"But your innocence will be proved, dearest."

"Admitting this to be the result; through what a fearful ordeal does the virtue of a woman pass,—that virtue which should never be questioned, — when it is subjected to the odious, the defiling publicity of a judicial investigation! No! the burning ploughshare, over which

the female suspected of want of chastity was condemned to walk barefooted, as a mean of detecting the justice of the imputation, was a merciful penalty compared to that of the searing-iron of consuming shame which the notoriety of a *trial* inflicts on a sensitive mind. Then, to watch the struggles, to conceal grief and wounded honour, of those who were once proud of you; to know that their love and pity for one deemed impure, expose their own reputations to censure — oh! all this once felt, never can be erased from the memory, and poisons every thought, destroys every earthly hope! From such misery there is but one refuge — the grave; but one hope — the mercy of that God, who can distinguish between error and guilt, and can pardon her whom men condemn."

It is in vain, my dearest husband, that I endeavour to lead her to take a less sombre

view of her position. Her womanly pride, and, above all, the extreme modesty peculiar to her character, have received wounds too deep, too deadly, ever to be healed; and, however her innocence may be proved, hers is not a nature to drag on a protracted life of fancied humiliation, or to submit to the capricious kindness of some, and the still cherished malignant doubts of others.

Could the young and fair of her own sex, who, unthinking of crime, recklessly expose themselves to its suspicion, behold this lovely and unhappy creature sinking into a premature grave as a refuge from shame, how would they tremble at even the approach of levity, or the semblance of impropriety of manner; and how carefully would they preserve that decorum which should ever be the outward and visible sign of the purity within!

The love of Augusta for her father and

mother, demonstrated in a thousand ways, is the most touching sight I ever beheld. It seems as if the cords that unite their hearts are drawn more tightly now that they are so soon to be rent asunder for ever. But even this tender affection makes her more alive to the sense of the wound inflicted on their peace — by the stain affixed to her honour. Yes; it is one of the peculiarities of the heart of woman, that the blow which most afflicts her, is that which must wound the hearts of those dear to her.

In compliance with the wishes of Augusta, we have chosen a different route to the direct one to Vernon Hall; consequently, we are unknown at the inns where we stop; and this privacy is a great relief to her feelings.

"What a blessing to die at home!" she often murmurs; "with no prating London physicians to describe to their fashionable and

idle valetudinarian all the symptoms of —— a broken heart; no hireling domestics of a season to profane one's name at the adjacent alehouses; no newspapers to detail daily 'the little better,' and 'something worse,' of poor Lady A.; and no strange pastor to speak comfort to dying ears, or patience to agonised ones. No, blessed be God! I return to the peaceful home of my infancy, where no eye will glance suspicion, no tongue utter, no heart form it. Good Dr. Henderson will not make my malady the topic of his visits to his other patients. The gray-headed domestics, who have known me since my birth, will not talk lightly of me. Our provincial paper will not give the *on dits* of my health; and dear, good Doctor Wilmington, will smooth my passage to the grave, and best comfort those who are left to mourn for me."

She loves to dwell on her approaching

end, to which she continually refers, as persons do to a long and pleasurable journey which they are about to undertake. Nor does she neglect to prepare for it, by prayer, meditation, and the cultivation of a contrite spirit. I never saw a creature throw off the faults of human nature so wholly, or clothe her spirit in meekness and holiness, as she does hers. Once, and only once, since the first day of her return to reason, I have ventured to name Lord Nottingham. She became crimsoned with shame; and, after a moment's pause, begged me to mention him no more. Then, resuming, after an internal struggle, "yet, why should I conceal from you, Mary, now, that by a consciousness of my sin, and a deep penitence, which I trust in the Almighty has atoned for it, that I felt for him a guilty passion, which rendered me blind and heedless to the danger to which I was exposing my fame, by permit-

ting his daily visits. I was mad, infatuated — but dearly have I expiated that one sin. I trust that *he* never suspected my weakness; but, if he did, he never presumed. Nor did he insult me with a declaration of love; yet, a secret sympathy seemed to exist between us, that convinced me I was dear to him.

"If I did not feel that my days are numbered, I would not wound your chaste ear, Mary, with this avowal of an unhallowed passion; but, it is right I should humiliate myself by confessing it, now that it is only remembered with contrition. Think of the degradation to which this sinful love exposed me, when I tell you that a person — ay, and a woman, too — attempted to console me for the shame, the ignominy to which I was reduced, by holding out to me the prospect of being divorced! Yes, Mary, divorced! and then — I blush while repeating it — I might

marry, as she said, the object of my affection. Was not this degradation? Yet, to this did I bring myself by my own infatuation."

Such are the reflections of this dear and suffering creature; which prove that she was formed, not only to live in purity, but to live unsuspected. I write to you while she is slumbering; but, even her dreams are haunted by the thoughts that occupy her when awake; for, I have heard her low, sweet voice, continually repeat,—"Indeed, I am not guilty! O, do not believe it!"

Much as I languish to have you with me, my beloved, yet I am not so selfish as to repine, knowing how your time is occupied; nor could I wish one hour of that life abridged, the continuance of whose frail tenure keeps you from

Your own

MARY.

THE MARQUESS OF NOTTINGHAM TO HENRY MORDAUNT, ESQ.

My dear Mordaunt — All that the most gloomy imagination could have feared, has occurred — Annandale has commenced legal proceedings against me; and my infatuated passion and imprudent attentions have plunged the pure and lovely object of them into a position the most humiliating to a noble nature like hers. Annandale must be the dupe to some plot, of which his innocent wife is the victim; for, I cannot think him so vile as to take the step he has done, without a belief in her culpability; and how could this belief have ever been formed, except by some wilful misrepresentations made to him, and some dark scheme put in practice to give a colour to the charge. My suspicions all

point to Miss Montressor; yet, what could be the inducement to conduct at once so wicked and so apparently causeless? I can discover no clue to this labyrinth of crime; but I loathe and execrate myself, for having furnished the occasion for its wearing, even for a moment, the semblance of probability, which it never could have done, but for my attentions.

Lady Annandale is ill—confined to her bed. All this I learn through the newspapers; for, I dare not, under present circumstances, send to inquire at her father's door. Consequently, I, who could not bear to think of being a single day without seeing her, and who, for the accomplishment of this selfish enjoyment, have compromised her reputation, am now debarred the privilege of even a common acquaintance —that of sending to inquire after her health; and dare not even hope ever to behold her again.

Her innocence of this foul charge must be made manifest: nothing but the most wilful perjury can be brought against her. However, whether acquitted or condemned, too well do I know her, to indulge a hope that she would ever again consent to see me, and thus give a colour to the odious suspicions my attentions have excited.

Lady Delaward has come to London, to be near her. I was sure she would; for, she is not a woman to doubt the purity of which her own feelings must be the guarantee; or to shrink from the responsibility of countenancing the innocence she does not doubt. She is worthy to be the friend of Augusta. But let me not use that name with a familiarity that I dare not adopt were she present; for, notwithstanding her youth and inexperience, never yet did a woman preserve a more dignified reserve than Lady Annandale,— a reserve that

emanated from the inherent modesty of her nature.

I wander about at night like a disturbed spirit, and find myself continually in Grosvenor Square, gazing on the house that contains this suffering angel. The whole of the side where Lord Vernon's house stands is covered with straw; the knocker is tied up; and the entire mansion has an air of gloom and desolation which chills my heart. It was in that house, which now presents so dull and cheerless an aspect, that, a few weeks ago, I saw this lovely creature, in all the bloom of health and youth. How looks she now? Bowed down by shame and sorrow; for, well do I know, that even the consciousness of her innocence will not enable her to support the false, the insulting suspicions, to which her honour is exposed; and by me! — me, who should have shielded it from even the shadow of a doubt. I have

been her bitterest, cruellest enemy; and she must loathe me, when she reflects on the irreparable injury I have inflicted on her.

I never go out during the day, or receive any visits. I could not bear, at such a crisis, to meet the eye of curiosity, or to have my looks or manner commented upon, and cited as presumptive proofs of the truth or falsehood of the vile charge against that honour I know to be so spotless. To affect a cheerfulness utterly repugnant to my feelings, would be impossible; and the gloomy despondency I cannot shake off, would be considered as evidence of guilt. O world! world! how often are your conclusions erroneous! and how prone are you to attribute the vilest motives to actions, where guilt never was imagined!

I destroy all the newspapers that refer to this foul libel; and writhe in agony when I reflect how many thousands of them will

circulate in the various parts of the globe, disseminating far and wide these infamous aspersions on the fame of this angel: and I — *I* am the cause of all this! Better could I have borne that she had died while yet her reputation was as stainless as is her life, than have lived to see her name profaned, and made the subject of the ribald jests of the vile and vicious.

Bear with me, my dear Mordaunt; and believe me

Ever yours,

NOTTINGHAM.

THE COUNTESS OF DELAWARD TO THE EARL OF DELAWARD.

We reached this place last evening, my beloved; and most melancholy was our arrival. When we came within view of the park, my poor dear friend begged me to assist her to rise from her recumbent position.

"How thankful ought I to be, Mary," said she, "at being permitted to reach home ere I die. How verdant, how serene, how lovely, every thing here appears! See how the glorious sun has tinged the landscape, and now behold his last rays are shedding a golden light on the oriel window of the church — that church, dear friend, where I shall soon repose. How often have I entertained this thought of late, and longed to take up my everlasting rest there, away from all the dis-

honour and shame that have rendered life insupportable! How calm, how beautiful it looks! Never did weary traveller hail the end of his toilsome voyage with a more thankful spirit than I do the approaching termination of mine. You will think it a puerile feeling, dear Mary, yet, nevertheless, it gives me comfort that my earthly remains will repose in a spot where no harsh eye will fall on my grave, and where those only who have known and loved me since my birth will dwell on it. *They* will not believe me guilty: no, a mother's purity and a father's honour will vouch to them for the innocence of her who so lately left her happy home, and who so soon returned to it, blighted in fame and health, to leave it no more. Yes, the returning so accompanied, supported by parents, loved and honoured by all; and cheered by the presence of the dear and faithful friend of her infancy, whose whole

life is an unsullied page of brightest virtue, — yes, this is to be blessed! Your presence proves my freedom from guilt to all here; and I thank you, Mary, with a heart overflowing with gratitude and affection, for this invaluable proof of friendship."

The old gray-headed servants met us at the door, sorrow imprinted on every face. My poor Augusta had a faint smile for each, but she was too much exhausted to speak; and we bore her to the cheerful apartment she had always occupied in other and happier days. I cannot tell you, my beloved, how much the sight of this chamber agitated me, by recalling to memory the blooming creature, full of life and hope, whom I had so often, and so lately, beheld in it; and thus forcing me to contrast that bright vision with the pale and fragile being before me, on whose brow the characters of death are but too plainly traced. There she

lay reclined on the sofa, her long lids closed, and large drops stealing from beneath them down her still beautiful face. When she had gained some degree of composure, and found herself again alone with me, her eyes wandered all over the room, fixing, with a tender interest, on every object; and she said,—

"It is strange, dear friend, that, on looking around me here, I could almost fancy that all that has occurred within the last few months has been a fearful dream, every thing appears so exactly as in former happy times. Ah, there is nothing changed but me!"

She wept on my bosom for a few minutes; but hearing the step of her mother, she endeavoured to subdue her emotions, although I observed that the watchful eye of affection had quickly discovered them.

"Mother!" said Augusta, "let me see good Dr. Wilmington early to-morrow, and

receive the sacrament from his hands. I wish that you, and my father too, should share this consolation with me; and you also, dear friend," she added, turning to me. "I feel so tranquil, so happy, now that I am in my home,"—and she embraced her mother,—"that I long to render thanks to the Almighty, who has listened to my prayers, and vouchsafed this blessing."

She expressed a hope that her father would enable her to bequeath a provision of five thousand pounds to Miss Montressor, and pay a yearly allowance to the nurse of Lord Annandale's son, as an incentive to her to take care of the child.

"Poor Caroline Montressor!" said she; "it is so painful to be wholly dependent on her aunt" (for Augusta knows not that Mrs. Wickenham is no more), "and it is dangerous to be poor, when the principles are not deeply

fixed. Let this donation, dearest mother, be notified to her, as a last proof of my regard."

I am sure that if Augusta desired them to bestow half their fortune on any one, these adoring parents would instantly consent to her desire; for their only source of comfort seems to exist in a compliance with her wishes. You shall hear from me again to-morrow, my beloved: until then, adieu.

Augusta has had a tranquil night, and appears more composed. She desired that all the old servants might be permitted to be present when she received the sacrament. Her wish was obeyed; and a more touching sight it would be impossible to imagine than that of this angelic creature, reduced almost to a breathing shadow, reclined on the sofa, with her father, mother, and myself, bending over

her, and all the gray-headed domestics kneeling around.

" Before I receive the sacred elements you are about to administer to me, Dr. Wilmington," said she, " I wish, in the presence of all these mortal witnesses, and in the presence of that merciful God, to whom the secrets of all hearts are known, to declare, with the lips of a dying woman, my perfect innocence of the crime of which I am accused; and my deep and heartfelt contrition for having, by a want of prudence and decorum, lent a semblance of probability to the charge. I avow the error of my conduct, in having too much disregarded worldly opinion; and ask pardon of Almighty God, for having furnished cause for scandal, and led those who have condemned me to form erroneous conclusions."

There was not a dry eye in the room; even that of the venerable pastor was dimmed with

tears, as he witnessed this act of humility in one whose besetting sin he knew to be pride.

"I wish, also," resumed Augusta, "to express my contrition at not having taken the pains that every wife should take to conciliate her husband, as I, too late! feel that had I so done, mine never would have condemned me unheard."

He administered the sacrament to her, of which we also partook; but not until he had given us one of the most impressive and touching discourses that ever fell from human lips.

Augusta is now asleep; a blessed calm seems spread over, and a faint smile plays on her pale lip; the rays of the setting sun have penetrated through the muslin curtains, casting a bright shade of rose over every object around, and tinging her face with a radiance that renders it of almost unearthly beauty. No,

never, in the brightest days of health, did I behold her so lovely as at this moment! She moves — I must leave you.

Alas! my dear, dear friend is no more! She passed away from this life without a struggle or sigh; and is now, I humbly trust, an angel in heaven. Though prepared to lose her, I thought not that she was so soon to leave us; and I feel the blow more poignantly, because I thought it more distant. I left off writing to you on seeing her move; and, on approaching her, discoverd that she had ceased to breathe. Her poor father entered a moment after, and found that I had fainted. Do not be alarmed about me, dearest, I am better now; and having to assist good Dr. Wilmington in endeavouring to console the heart-stricken parents of my lost friend, I feel the exertion most beneficial to me.

Never was there any thing more touching than the appearance of Augusta in the sleep of death. An expression of beatitude is impressed on her calm and marble-like face, that renders it almost divine; and a stranger would suppose that she could not have numbered above twelve or thirteen years. When I behold her with that heavenly countenance, my grief becomes less acute; for there is something inexpressibly soothing in dwelling on that angelic face. Poor dear Lord and Lady Vernon find the same consolation, and have sent express for two of the best artists from London, to make a picture, and a cast, from which a bust is to be executed of her. How I wish you, my beloved, were here to see her! for never before did death assume so lovely, so blessed an aspect. Who, that could behold that tranquil brow and angelic repose, could imagine the anguish that has preyed upon her pure heart

during the last few weeks? But she has escaped from it now, and is in that blessed kingdom where "the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest;" where we, I humbly trust, may one day be united to her.

Ever your own

MARY.

FROM THE MARQUESS OF NOTTINGHAM TO EDWARD MORDAUNT, ESQ.

MORDAUNT, I have destroyed her!—she is no more! and I,—I who fancied I knew her,—could indulge the vain hope, even until the last, that she would have borne up against the stain attempted to be cast on her honour. It was my mad passion that drew shame and degradation on her name; it was *I* who consigned this pure and lovely being to an un-

timely grave, leaving her parents childless, to mourn their misplaced confidence in one so wholly unworthy as I have proved myself to be. Of *her* innocence they never could have a doubt—as who could that really knew her?—but of my weak and wicked conduct, in paying her those continual and marked attentions, to which no married woman can be subjected without a loss of reputation, they can form but one opinion; and that one, my own conscience tells me, I have but too well merited.

I am leaving England — perhaps for ever. My mind is so tortured that I can arrange no plans. Oh! why had I not courage to fly from her when I first discovered the state of my heart?— But, no; selfish and cruel as even the most obdurate could be, thoughtless of aught save my own gratification, I continued to hover round her until my passion be-

came too evident, and thus lent a colour to the false charges against her. Never, never can I forgive myself! *I*, who could not bear to absent myself from her presence for a few hours, must now learn to bear the soul-harrowing conviction, that I shall see her no more; that she, the loveliest, the purest of her sex, is in the early grave to which my unworthy passion has conducted her. I embark for Spain to-morrow. I can write no more.

Your unhappy friend,

NOTTINGHAM.

MISS MONTRESSOR TO LA MARQUISE DE VILLEROI.

I AM a wretch indeed, Delphine, and the measure of my crimes is full. Augusta — the lovely, the pure, the wronged Augusta, is no more ; and has found in death a refuge from the shame my vile plots brought on her name. Fool, fool that I was, not to have foreseen, that a being of a nature like hers never could have supported a suspicion of dishonour.

I have destroyed her ! *I,* whom she loved and trusted, and who should have shielded her from the breath of evil, was the serpent who deliberately coiled around her heart to sting it mortally. There is a weight of guilt on my soul that oppresses it beyond endurance. I loathe my own existence ; and am filled with self-abhorrence, by reflections that pursue

me, night and day, with unremitting bitterness, — eternally suggesting the recollection of this lovely creature, as she was when I first used my evil influence over her innocent mind, which not all my arts could corrupt, and who, by my fiend-like machinations, I have sent, in a few short months, to an early grave, as a refuge from the shame I had brought on her.

This fatal intelligence was communicated to me by Lord Annandale. Even he, senseless as he is, is shocked; for he believed not that she was seriously ill. If he knew who it was that destroyed her! And he offers me consolation, too; dwells on my indulgence towards her errors, and the kind excuses I made for her when he had discovered her guilt! Oh, this unmerited praise, how it pierces my heart! — that heart which could, with unexampled and malicious cruelty, steel itself against the pleadings of humanity, and

persevere in destroying so pure, so guileless a creature.

Lord Annandale says, that he has given orders to stop all legal proceedings, now that death has released him from a marriage he wished to dissolve; and that, as soon as a decent time shall have elapsed, he will call on me for the fulfilment of my promise of becoming his. Little does this weak man dream of the difference between the innocent being he has repudiated, and the guilty one he would take to his arms. Little thinks he, that the one on whose brow he would place the coronet of his ancestral line, is the crouching, trembling slave of a low ruffian; a wretch, whose hands are steeped in blood, and whose lips may, at any hour, stamp disgrace and infamy on the future Countess of Annandale.

Let me come to you, Delphine, and rest

beneath your roof until I become a wife, and entitled to some legal protection. Here, I have no friend — nay, no one to whom I could give the term, even in its broad sense, except the Comtesse Hohenlinden; and her house, the scene of continual gaiety and dissipation, would be no fit abode for me under my present circumstances. Let me have a line, to say I may come, and I will instantly leave England, where every object reminds me of all that I wish to forget — my crimes, and their punishment. Once the wife of Annandale, I will become a different creature; my new duties shall be scrupulously performed, my past sins deeply repented, and atoned.

There may be still pardon for guilt even dark as mine; and if that wretch, whose power hangs threatening over me, like the sword of Damocles suspended but by a thread,

molests me not, I may again know peace on earth.

A letter has this moment arrived, apprising me that Augusta has secured me five thousand pounds, as a last token of regard. To *me*, who betrayed — who destroyed her! This is one of the rewards of my crime; it is the price of the blood of my victim! And she could think of me,— dear, suffering angel! and that kindly, too, even when the hand of death was on her; while I was anticipating the succession to her position, and, for the attainment of this evil object, not hesitating to sacrifice her fame, and, consequently, her life.

This last act of hers has flooded my heart with tenderness, which runs over at my eyes; and I feel relieved by the tears that seem inexhaustible. Would that I could shed them

upon your bosom, Delphine! and that you could speak comfort to the tortured heart of your

CAROLINE.

MISS MONTRESSOR TO LA MARQUISE DE VILLEROI.

THE papers have announced to me, *chère* Delphine, that the unfortunate man arrested for the murder of my poor aunt has been tried, found guilty, and condemned to death. Oh, gracious God! how bitter are my feelings at the reflection that *I* knew his innocence — that a word of mine might have saved him, and that I dared not utter it! How dreadful, how appalling, to know that the existence of

a fellow-creature depends on me, and be denied the power of saving him! Here is another crime added to the fearful catalogue of mine—another life, which I have been the means of sacrificing! Where, where will the fatal consequences of my guilt end? I cannot banish the terrible thought from my mind, that the blood of this innocent man rests on my head. In what a labyrinth of guilt do I find myself entangled — one crime following fast on the steps of the other! I wonder I do not lose my senses, and almost wish I did; for madness, if it produced obliviousness of this last year, would be preferable—oh, how infinitely preferable!—to reason.

Imagination pictures this unfortunate man, led forth to the scene of his death; his white locks waving in the breeze; his tottering limbs bending beneath the weight of his languid frame; and his eyes turned towards that

heaven, where, alone, he believes his innocence to be known. I see his wretched wife and children, bowed down by despair and anguish, surrounded by an unpitying crowd, who, believing him culpable, sympathise not with the grief of his family. I see him launched into eternity, to meet from his God that mercy denied him on earth; while *I — I*, who know his innocence, and might have saved him, have allowed him to be sacrificed! In utter hopelessness, I have thrown myself upon my knees before that Power whose might I feel, but whose clemency I hardly dare to supplicate — for I am steeped in guilt, that almost defies hope. What atonement can be made to the widow and orphans? what can efface the indelible shame inflicted on their guiltless lives, by the crime affixed to that of their equally guiltless father? I tremble in dismay before the terrors of an avenging God, whose

mercies I have slighted in the hours of prosperity, but whose wrath I dare not anticipate.

I loathe life, poisoned as it is by the consciousness of crimes that render it nearly insupportable; yet I turn with fear and trembling from death — that passage to an eternity of punishment, which conscience tells me I have but too deeply merited. My dreams are haunted by the sweet face of the angelic Augusta—her whom I so ruthlessly condemned to an untimely grave; the stern and reproachful countenance of my murdered aunt looks menacingly at me; and the assassin's wild and demoniacal laugh rings in my ear, as he threatens me with exposure and infamy. Oh, God! oh, God! how long can nature sustain this torture?

Pity me, Delphine — though I am unworthy of pity, for my life has been one continued career of selfishness and turpitude;

and it is only lately that I have awaked to a sense of the faults that have plunged me in guilt, from the depths of which no ray of hope is visible. It is solely by the aid of opiates that I have been able to procure sleep for some months. How my health has not sunk under the weight of remorse and regret that oppresses me, seems miraculous: but it is only the good and beloved who are snatched away; the bad and unloved are left on earth as a punishment and an example.

My maid has just told me that the young man who was to have married the daughter of my poor aunt's faithful steward, renounced her on hearing the charge against her father; and, as she was deeply attached to him, his desertion has preyed so heavily upon her, that, even before the condemnation of her father, her health had become so impaired as to leave little hope of her recovery. This, also, is one

of the results of my not having declared his innocence! But when will the results of my crimes terminate?

Adieu! adieu!

FROM LA MARQUISE DE VILLEROI TO MISS MONTRESSOR.

Ma chère Caroline,—How much pain does it give me to be compelled to tell you that I cannot receive you again beneath my roof! Do you think I could have been so unkind towards the friend of my youth as not to have proposed her coming to me immediately on the death of her aunt, had not a cruel and insurmountable obstacle opposed it? You know, *chère amie,* when you left France, that the expenses of our vast establishment had greatly

embarrassed our finances; but, alas! you did not know that the passion for gaming, so fatally indulged in by my husband, had totally ruined us. *Maman*, after having repeatedly assisted to retard the ruin that threatened, at length became wearied by such frequent demands on her liberality; and, influenced by le Père Maubois, who, I formerly told you, had acquired a perfect dominion over her, has retired to Italy, attended by him, and has there fixed her abode, refusing to lend us any further aid.

Reduced to positive want—having no longer the means of supporting our establishment, or paying our creditors, la Duchesse de Chateauneuf, the aunt of my husband, has received us beneath her roof, after having made a thousand humiliating stipulations; the most bitter of all, that of never permitting you to enter her house. You may remember, *chère amie*, how

much she disliked you ever since she detected you mimicking her one day before a brilliant circle. How well I remember it, and how every body laughed! Next to *maman*, you were the person she most detested; and, therefore, you will at once perceive that, depending on her wholly, as we do, it is impossible for us to comply with your wishes. You can form no idea of the *triste* life we lead in her antiquated mansion, Rue de Grenelle, in the Faubourg St. Germains. Would you believe it? she prohibits my receiving le Duc de Chatillion, or la Comtesse de Hauteforte, to whom, as you know, my husband has been so long attached. She will not allow us to have *écarté* of an evening, but insists on either of us playing *piquet* with her for half *francs*. No box at the opera — no visits to the theatres; in short, no any thing that is agreeable or rational. Then, she has the very worst cook in France;

consequently, we have no choice between being starved or poisoned, so execrable is her *cuisine*. I am confident you would pity us, were you to witness the privations we endure.

I am sure *notre tante* only patronises us to vex *maman*, who has thrown us off; but, as she is rich and old, we must please her, and my husband will be her heir: I only hope she will not long keep him an expectant one. *Comme c'est drole*, that Miladi Annandale should die because she was suspected! How strange and exaggerated your compatriots are in their notions! *Je ne comprend rien de tout cela.* I only comprehend that, if every lady in Paris who is suspected chose, therefore, to die, we should have very few left in society.

Do you know, *ma chère amie*, that you become *tout à fait originale dans vos idées*, and that you really require to leave your land of fogs, and mix with reasonable people here,

to dispel the *ennui*, or devils blue, as the English say, that have taken possession of your brain. You think yourself very wicked, guilty of *des grands crimes*, and you write as the heroines of tragedy speak: but I think you only an *unlucky*, and not a wicked person; and so thinks *mon mari*, to whom I have shewed your letters. It is the motive, and not the results, that constitutes the crime.

Your first error turned out unfortunately — that was simply an indiscretion; and, had not *ce mauvais sujet* that caught your youthful fancy been ruined, and left *sans sous*, he would not have again appeared to cast a shadow on the horizon of your prospects — this I call unlucky. When you opened the window, and he entered, you had no evil motive towards your aunt, *malgré* she was *un peu revêche*, and not *un peu ennuyeuse*. His poverty tempted him to take her money

and jewels; and his safety, probably, urged him to the rest. All this was very unlucky; but *his* poverty was, as I think I have satisfactorily proved, the cause of all *cette affaire tragique;* and you have, consequently, nothing of which to accuse yourself that I can see, except not having chosen a lover neither likely to ruin himself, nor to be ruined—nor capable, even in a case of necessity, of strangling old ladies.

With regard to Miladi Annandale, you have been, also, unlucky. It is true, the *triste* position in which you found yourself *chez madame votre tante,* compelled you to urge your young friend to a marriage for which she had lost all taste: but, had she been a reasonable woman, she might have, notwithstanding, been very happy; for, with a good fortune, a brilliant position, and a weak, indulgent husband, what more could she desire?

It is not your fault that all these *agrémens* sufficed not to satisfy her—the fault rests with herself. She falls in love with that imbecile *milord*, whose stupid name I forget; you wish to enable her to marry him, and take yourself the man she dislikes: what could be more rational or agreeable? She mars this judicious and feasible scheme solely by her unaccountable scruples and false notions; then, perversely, will not be consoled; and consequently — dies: while you, absurdly, blame yourself; as if you, or any other reasonable person, could have possibly foreseen such a termination to the comedy you had prepared, but which her *entêtement* alone has converted into a tragedy.

You are unhappy, too, because she has left you an independence. Of all the incomprehensible occurrences which you have related to me, your contrition on this account

puzzles my brain the most; for it appears to me that such a circumstance should only be a cause of rejoicing. You say that she was an angel; and, as I have formed no very definite notions of the angelic state, I am perfectly willing to believe your assertion — especially as she was, certainly, utterly unlike all the women I ever either saw or heard described. Supposing, then, your classification to be accurate, the earth, undoubtedly, was no fit place for her; and you should, therefore, exult that she has repaired to a more congenial sphere, leaving you the possession of her terrestrial honours.

This, *chère* Caroline, is my philosophy. I owe it to you; for you must remember, when you first enlightened me, I was the slave of certain old-fashioned prejudices, which you persuaded me to discard. Ever since this period, I have endeavoured to make life as

agreeable as possible, leaving the rest to chance, which you have taught me to believe produces all things for the best. I have always thought, and your letters have more fully convinced me, that poverty is the cause of every evil. I mean, therefore, to eschew this most tempting of all the demons to the utmost of my power; and as the bequests of your aunt, and *la romanesque miladi*, have secured you a comfortable independence, you are safe, even should you not marry *ce faible milord*. Why abandon the philosophy you used to be so proud of, and in which you took such pains to make me a proficient? If you find England so dull, why not come to Paris, and establish yourself with some one of the many *dames de haut rang, ruinées*, who would be but too happy to enact the *rôle* of *chaperon* until you marry?

Adieu, chère amie! Mon mari m'a chargé

de vous dire mille choses aimables de sa part. Write to me often, and believe me always

Votre amie devouée

DELPHINE, MARQUISE DE VILLEROI.

MISS MONTRESSOR TO LA MARQUISE DE VILLEROI.

IT is now a year since I have written to you, *chère* Delphine: your last letter gave me so much pain by its philosophy,—that pernicious philosophy, which I shall ever accuse myself for having instilled into you,—that I had not spirits to write to you of aught but my regrets, and in these you have convinced me you take no interest, have no sympathy.

Oh, Delphine! that philosophy failed me

the moment when, wounded and despairing, I tried to lean on it for consolation. It stood revealed to me shorn of all its sophistry, and hideous in its deformity; to remorse it could give no answer, to grief no balm. It seemed like some chimera dire; the creation of an excited brain, that mocked my anguish, and added to my despair. When I discovered its fallacy, Delphine, I shuddered at recollecting that you, also, were its dupe, that *I* had made you so, and I prayed for power to exorcise this foul spirit from the breast into which I had introduced it. I pray so still, and entreat you to believe that nothing but unhappiness can await those who trust in it, as I know by bitter, bitter experience.

Every line in your letter was as a dagger that pierced my soul, and the wounds bled not the less that I had furnished the weapon.

In a week I am to become the wife of Lord

Annandale, to take the place of that angel whom I destroyed. I shall fear to see her in all the rooms which she once occupied; and my heart melts in tenderness before the visions my fancy creates, as I behold her approving the change in my sentiments — a change that she would have hailed with such satisfaction.

I have been living in solitude during the last year, in a cottage near Richmond. I have read much, and thought more—I hope not without profit. I have renounced all faith in the pernicious doctrines that so long perverted my mind, and have laid down a system of conduct for my future life, which, if it redeem not my past crimes, will, at least, be a security against the committal of any future ones.

Adieu, chère Delphine! *Votre amie,*

CAROLINE.

FROM LA MARQUISE DE VILLEROI TO MISS MONTRESSOR.

It gave me great pleasure, *ma chère* Caroline, to see your hand-writing again, after so long and unaccountable a silence. *Vraiment c'étoit bien méchante de votre part*, to leave me so long in ignorance of your destiny. You deserve a severe lecture; but, as I have nearly as great a dislike to giving as receiving such proofs of interest, I shall spare you, hoping this generosity on my side will be rewarded by a more regular correspondence on yours.

And so you are on the eve of being transformed into *Madame la Comtesse d'Annandale*. I wish you joy with all my heart; and, I trust, that your new position will bestow on you all the happiness that wealth, station, and the

various *agrémens* you possess ought to secure. That they may do so, let me counsel you to abandon the romantic and exaggerated notions you have lately acquired — notions peculiar to your countrywomen; and which tend to render them dissatisfied with the actual and positive good within their reach, because it falls short of some fancied one of which they have dreamt, or read in romances.

You have been of late disposed to view all *en noir*. This is neither wise nor philosophical, and, because I bantered you on this sombre tendency, you cease to write to me. You have suffered an excited imagination to represent le Chevalier de Carency as the fearful hero of a melo-drame, instead of a *mauvais sujet*, which he is; and you then become terrified at the phantom which you have yourself created. Had you assailed him with ridicule, of which all men, and especially vain ones, are so sus-

ceptible, *he* would have been more tractable, and you, *chère* Caroline, would have suffered less annoyance.

Mais à present, tout cela est fini, and the brilliancy of your new position will console you for the troubles of the past. Would that I could tell you that mine was ameliorated since I last wrote to you. *Hélas!* it is any thing but agreeable; but, as dwelling on the subject will not render it less painful, I will spare you and myself the useless chagrin of recapitulating my grievances.

Apropos of grievances, *mon pauvre* Florestan, is still tormented by his abominable creditors, who menace him with an arrest. *Mais le cher homme s'amuse toujours, malgré tout cela.* He is really a philosopher, and reduces to practice what others only adopt in theory. His embarrassments are a great source of discomfort to me; for, independently of

their frequently depriving me of the pleasure of his society, by compelling his absence, in order to avoid his creditors, it furnishes his tiresome aunt with an excuse for prohibiting me from entering into general society: as if my staying at home, which *ennuies* me to death, could pay poor Florestan's debts. *Mais que voulez-vous?* Old people, and, above all, old aunts, are invariably stupid, and prone to torment, and never are at all amusing, except on the stage, when their peculiarities are *mis en evidence.*

The lectures of *madame la duchesse, ma tante*, are interminable; and, now that Florestan is not, as hitherto, present to share them, they fall still more heavily on me. The house resembles nothing but a convent, which, of the two, would be less disagreeable, for the abbess would not have the knowledge of my past indiscretions to convert into a theme for homilies and reproaches, which form the constant

subject of *ma tante's* conversation. *Mais je vous demande pardon, ma chère, pour vous avoir ennuyé avec cette triste tirade:* I really had determined on not entering on my domestic chagrins, but some few have escaped from my pen; be grateful that I have stopped so soon.

I wish you would induce *milord* to come to Paris, that I might again embrace you; and assure you, *vivâ voce*, how truly I am

Ma chère Caroline's

Amie devouée,

DELPHINE, MARQUISE DE VILLEROI.

THE COUNTESS OF ANNANDALE TO THE MARQUISE DE VILLEROI.

You know not how much it pains me, *ma chère* Delphine, to discover, by your last letter, that Florestan is menaced with St. Pelagie, and you scarcely less than a prisoner in the sombre resi-

dence of his aunt. I entreat your acceptance of the enclosed sum: any banker at Paris will give you gold for the bank-note; and do not imagine that, by its acceptance, you put me to the least inconvenience; I am only too happy to be of use to one for whom I entertain so sincere a regard.

It is a great relief to my feelings that we have come to spend the first month of our wedded life at Annandale Castle—a fine seat of my husband's, where Augusta has never been. Here is no portrait, no memorial of her, to remind me that she ever existed; nothing, save the never-dying, still, small voice of conscience, which incessantly reproaches me.

Lord Annandale is all kindness—all affection; and every thing around me is marked by a splendour and taste that might satisfy the most ambitious and fastidious of my sex. Now, therefore, for the first time, I am mis-

tress of the rank and wealth for which I have so long sighed; and for the attainment of which I have committed such fearful crimes. Yet, do I enjoy the coveted baubles, now that they are mine? Alas, no! the thought of how they have been obtained destroys all; and gladly — oh, how gladly! would I exchange them for obscurity, could I obtain peace of mind.

The husband who cherishes and smiles on me would turn away in horror, knew he my crimes, or that he was the dupe to my arts; and the very attendants, who approach me with such reverential deference, would shrink back if they only dreamt of the turpitude of the new-made bride. I am forced to exert every energy to conceal the depression of my spirits — a depression attributed by Lord Annandale to a nervous illness, brought on by the awful death of my aunt, and in-

creased by that of Augusta. *He* often compliments me on my sensibility (think what I must feel at such unmerited commendations!) and redoubles his attentions, in order to subdue my sadness.

He is, naturally, a kind-hearted and good-natured man, with gentle and agreeable manners; his only failing, and it is a venial one too, is his excessive vanity, which has led him into situations in which his morals have been injured, and his sensibility blunted. He is so grateful for the high opinion of his mental and personal qualifications which he believes me to entertain, that his complaisance and indulgence for me are unbounded, and his generosity equally so.

Yesterday he presented me with the family diamonds, which are magnificent. How many thoughts did the sight of them recall! Well do I remember, when, the day previous to

Augusta's wedding, I was dwelling, with longing and envious eyes on their dazzling lustre, how she turned away, regardless of them; and only answered me with tears, when I expressed my astonishment that she could be so insensible to the pleasure of possessing them.

They are now mine; but do they give *me* pleasure? Alas! no; for they remind me, that, to obtain them, I have lost a jewel beyond all price — the peace that a conscience free from guilt bestows.

When I look round on the stately saloons, splendid pictures, and magnificent furniture, of this fine castle, I almost wonder that, being its mistress, I can be otherwise than happy; yet, too late I find, that the splendour purchased by wicked schemes, and successful artifices, can never give happiness. I forget the *end* in the *means* used to attain it; and turn with disappointment from possessions

which cannot banish the sense of remorse from my mind.

Yet, I am not ungrateful to Lord Annandale—far from it. Nay, more; a warmer feeling of gratitude than I ever thought I should experience towards him fills my heart. It is a mingled sentiment of pity for his being the dupe of the plot I have practised upon him, and thankfulness for the affection with which he treats me. I wish to repay him, by every exertion in my power for his welfare and happiness; and think, that if there be still a chance of peace for me on earth, it rests on the fulfilment of the duties my new position demands. When he tenderly reproaches me for my altered character and unusual gravity, I feel the colour rise to my cheeks, and vainly endeavour to assume the semblance of gaiety; but I cannot long sustain the effort, and my spirits soon droop again.

He expresses alarm for my health, and proposes change of climate; but what change of climate or scene can ever banish from my memory the fatal recollections that poison my existence, and dash the cup of peace from my thirsty and fevered lips?

Adieu, *chère* Delphine! *votre amie*,

CAROLINE.

THE COUNTESS OF ANNANDALE TO THE MARQUISE DE VILLEROI.

DELPHINE, Delphine, I am lost! The assassin is here—he has found me! and well do I know that neither the arm of love, nor the protection of our princely household, can shield me from this fiend in human shape.

I was regaining some portion of my lost peace — the present was less bitter, the future less frowning; and I began to hope

that, by a deep contrition for the past, and a strict fulfilment of my new duties, I might ultimately obtain pardon from the Almighty. But it was not to be; for *me* there is no peace either here or hereafter: and terror, vague yet irresistible, palsies my nerves!

I left my chamber this morning with spirits less depressed than usual. The day was beautiful, and all nature seemed rejoicing. When I looked on the vast woods around this princely domain, and the countless herds of deer, grazing on the green lawns that intersperse them, the repose and grandeur of the scene delighted me; and I remembered, with pleasure, that this noble spot called me mistress. Its lord joined me on the terrace, and, marking the pleasure with which I gazed on the view, he drew me more affectionately to his side, and whispered kind, fond words, expressive of his increased partiality to Annandale Castle,

now that it had pleased me, and become a witness of his happiness.

How soothing is affection! and how do those who, like me, have known little of this sweetener of life, turn, with awakened tenderness, to him who administers the cordial! But why do I dwell on this now? Alas! I cling to the memory of this bright morning, and the hopes I then dared to indulge, as the last remnant of domestic peace; for the destroyer is at hand, and for his victim there is no escape.

Soon after breakfast, my husband proposed driving me in a pony phaeton; and we entered it, in cheerful spirits. Having proceeded through the beautiful grounds, he wished to shew me a picturesque point of view at the other side of a neighbouring village; in passing through which we suddenly came on *him* whose sight nearly deprived me of reason.

Hearing the wheels of a carriage, he turned round quickly, and, as I caught his glance, I uttered a piercing shriek, and fell back, nearly fainting. Lord Annandale instantly stopped, and, in the kindest way, inquired the cause of my alarm; which, when I had recovered, I attributed to the sight of a child running across the road, and my fears that it would be trampled by the horses.

I proposed returning to the castle, feeling too much agitated and unwell to continue our drive; and, even now that some hours have elapsed since I beheld that monster, I feel overpowered with terror: I dread being alone, and tremble each time that a servant enters, lest he should come to announce the presence of my enemy, or be the bearer of a letter from him.

Brief as was the glance I had of him, I saw that his apparel denoted the same state

of poverty as when I last had the misfortune to behold him: consequently, it is evident that the large sum, and the price of the jewels plundered from my murdered aunt, must have all disappeared, and he is come here to extort fresh supplies.

What will become of me? Oh, Delphine! my heart faints within me, and my brain is nearly maddened. Death, in its most fearful shape, would be preferable to dragging on an existence, every moment of which may be embittered by the presence or menaces of that atrocious man; who, after all my sacrifices, may denounce me when I can no longer administer to his wants.

Sometimes, in a fit of desperation, I have thought of avowing all to Lord Annandale; but a moment's reflection on the peculiarities of his character has led me to abandon the project. When I look around me, and

behold the splendour and elegances of this abode, and the vast train of retainers that await my will; yet think that, in the midst of state and power, *I*, the mistress of this proud and princely dwelling, must tremble before a wretch — an outcast, with whom the poorest of my dependents would scorn to hold intercourse — must feel that I am an accomplice in his guilt; and *that* guilt — the murder and robbery of one who stood to me in the position of a parent, who was my sole relative and protector, — can you wonder that my brain is nearly maddened, and that I pray for death, unfit as I am to meet it?

He has written to me. On entering my *chambre de toilette* to dress for dinner, my attendant presented me with his letter.

"The person who gave it to me, *madame la comtesse*," said Claudine, "was a foreigner— a terrible-looking man; so much so, that all

the servants bantered me on the bad countenance and shabbiness of appearance of my visitor; for so he represented himself to be, though I assured them that I did not know him. One of his eyes is concealed by a black patch, and his huge whiskers and moustaches nearly cover his face. I certainly have seen him before; — yes, now I recollect having seen that wicked face somewhere. Oh, yes—it was, sure enough, at the village of Ellersly, the very day preceding the shocking death of your poor aunt; for I remember, when I heard of the murder, I immediately said to her maid, good Mrs. Western, that I had seen the most suspicious-looking man imaginable, the day before, in the village. But she answered, that *he* could have nothing to do with the murder, all the windows and doors having been found fastened on the inside; 'therefore,' continued Mrs. Western, 'you see, Claudine, the dreadful crime must have

been committed by some one in the house, otherwise either a door or a window must have been found open.' "

Think, Delphine, what were my feelings during this harangue.

" Well, *madame la comtesse,*" resumed Claudine, " this is the very same man ; there cannot be two such in the world, I'm sure. So he sends in for me, saying he was a friend of my lady's maid, and wished to speak to her. " Give this letter to your mistress," cried he, " when she is alone;" and he looked so fierce and proud withal, my lady, that somehow he frightened me. I took courage, however, to tell him that I never delivered letters to *madame la comtesse.*

" I command you to be the bearer of this !" replied he, " and your lady, when she has read it, will acquaint you, you have done well ;" and off he walked, while the servants,

who came crowding round to stare at him, slunk back, alarmed by the sternness and ferocity of his glances. To be sure, when he was gone, they were all bold enough; for they fell to abusing his looks and manner, and accusing me for having such an acquaintance, saying he looked like a thief, or something worse."

Having dismissed Claudine, whose loquacity, once set in motion, it is difficult to arrest, I locked the door, and, with trembling hands, opened the letter. The sarcastic insolence of its comments on my marriage, and the menaces of exposing me to my husband, unless I shall comply with his conditions, I leave you to imagine; they are dictated in the most malignant spirit, and expressed in the most insulting language. He added, that he learned by the papers the murder of my aunt, and *hoped* that *I* had nothing to accuse myself of

in that mysterious affair—though the circumstance of all the doors and windows having been found secured on the inside looked somewhat suspicious.

Delphine, this man is a fiend! and such is the extraordinary malignity of his nature, that I sometimes almost entertain that superstitious dread of him which is described, in some of the German works, as being inspired by evil spirits who have assumed the human shape. He writes that, now I have become a great and rich lady, he gives me notice that I am to consider myself as the agent who is to supply his exigences, and with no niggard hand; that he will permit me to continue unexposed in my present dignity so long as I find means to administer to his wants; but that, if I do not furnish him with a sufficient liberality to enable him to live in a manner befitting his birth, he will denounce and hurl me from my

station, even though he himself perish in the deed.

Imagine my feelings as I perused this letter, which I instantly destroyed, lest it should ever be seen by mortal eye: but its characters are fixed in my memory, never to be effaced; and I am conscious that I am entangled for life in the meshes of that web of crime which this monster has woven round me too cunningly even to admit of hope of escape.

He says he will call on my maid to-morrow, for an answer. I have placed a large sum — all the money I had with me — in a small parcel, and intrusted it to Claudine to give him. She looked surprised — impertinently so, I thought, as I delivered it to her; and I felt abashed and rebuked by the glance of my own servant. Oh, Delphine, to what humiliation am I reduced! and where will all this misery end? I shudder at the prospect!

Lord Annandale, when we met in the library before dinner, informed me that, on returning from his ride, one of the gate-keepers had told him that a very extraordinary and suspicious man had entered and gone to the castle, who, when questioned, replied, that he was a friend of the *femme de chambre* of *la comtesse*. "Claudine must not permit strange followers, my love," continued Lord Annandale; "and it argues ill in her favour that she should have such an acquaintance as the man described; for old Winstanley, the gate-keeper, says, that if ever villain was written in a human countenance in legible characters, it surely is in his."

I felt the blood rush to my face, and trembled lest he should observe my emotion, while saying that I should prohibit Claudine from receiving such visitors. Should Annandale see the wretch when he comes to-morrow for

the answer! But why anticipate fresh evils, when already I am bewildered by the extent of my present ones?

The kindness and affection of Lord Annandale, so far exceeding my merits, overpower me; because I but too well know how quickly they would be withdrawn, were he to be acquainted with what this miscreant could relate: yes, he would loathe, he would spurn me. I have now reached the goal to which my ambition has so long pointed — a brilliant and noble establishment. To attain this object, I have stooped to deception, to treachery, which have been productive of results that would have arrested my schemes in their very commencement, could I but have anticipated them; for, unworthy as I am, never could I have persevered in my machinations, had I dreamt that they would have conducted the wronged, the innocent Augusta to her grave.

But *she* sleeps well, and is at peace; while *I* am tortured by the unceasing dread of detection, and the stings of a conscience that knows no rest. This recollection never leaves my brain, where it is stamped in characters of fire; nor can I forbear repeating it again and again to you, who are the sole being to whom I can unburthen my oppressed mind.

My nerves are so shattered that I am in a state of continued agitation; my health fails, and the tender interest its decay excites in my husband melts my hitherto stubborn heart. I find myself constantly contrasting his negligence to one, who was so infinitely, so immeasurably my superior in all respects, with his unvarying kindness to me; and this reflection inflicts a new pang, by reminding me that, had he been left free from my vile plots, he might — nay, he must have become sen-

sible of the value of the rich treasure he possessed.

Now that I know him better, I am convinced that, were he aware of the injustice of the charges against the honour of Augusta, he never would forgive his own credulity, nor cease to execrate the wretch who practised on it. I often turn from his glance of affection, as a criminal does from the eye of his accuser. Oh, Delphine, this state is insupportable! yet it was to attain it that I became the guilty creature I am.

I dare not venture out while this wretch remains in the neighbourhood; the sight of him would, I do believe, destroy me. I can write no more, for my head throbs with pain; to-morrow I will resume.

I hardly dared ask Claudine to-day if she had delivered the parcel; she said she had,

and "hoped *madame la comtesse* would prohibit that strange and fearful man from coming again, as some of the men-servants had made such disagreeable observations on his visits."

While she was yet speaking, Lord Annandale tapped at the door, and entered, looking discomposed and offended.

"I must ask you, my dear Lady Annandale," said he, "to insist on your *femme de chambre's* paying more attention to your commands in future; for again has her very suspicious-looking and disreputable acquaintance been seen here, and withdrawing, as I am informed, from another interview with her."

I saw that Claudine, though not comprehending more than a few words (my husband having spoken in English), was about to disclaim the acquaintance, and avow the truth; so, though I trembled with emotion, I made

a desperate effort to control myself, and desired Claudine to leave the room. She obeyed my mandate, but reluctantly, and in tears, and evidently most impatient to justify herself to my lord. As soon as she had withdrawn, I told him — though how my inventive powers could act at such a moment I now wonder— that the man in question was a near relative of Claudine's; that he had been unfortunate, and came to see her for the last time previous to leaving England; that she, poor thing, had felt acutely his distress, but had promised me to receive him no more.

Lord Annandale was immediately pacified, pitied poor Claudine, and offered some money to assist to pay her cousin's journey to Italy. Nay, he wished to speak to her himself, feeling sorry at having spoken harshly on the subject; but I dissuaded him from this proceeding.

So here am I again, Delphine, entered into

the crooked path of untruth ; and compromised, to a certain extent, before Claudine, who will naturally see that there is some mystery attached to this man's visits which I dare not avow, and the odium of which is cast upon her. All this weighs me down, but I feel there is no escape ; a temporary respite I may purchase, but Heaven only knows how short that respite may be, or how soon the recklessness of this monster may provoke some fearful *esclandre*.

I have had a most painful and humiliating scene with Claudine. She wept passionately, complained of being disgraced in the eyes of my lord, her reputation blemished in the opinion of the servants, and of being treated with insolence by that "*terrible mauvais sujet*," as she justly pronounced my evil genius to be.

nervous, too easily alarmed; and this timidity gives De Carency a power over you, that he will not fail to use to his profit, and to your continual annoyance — if not, ultimately, to your destruction. Prohibit your servants from letting any suspicious-looking person enter your doors; and, if he writes to you, commit the letters to the flames. Pursue this conduct but for a short time, and he will soon cease to torment you. He can gain nothing by exposing you to Lord Annandale, and would risk being arrested; for, in such a desperate dilemma, you, of course, could not hesitate to give him up to justice, as the assassin of your aunt.

You could assert that, having been acquainted with him when he was admitted to the best society, you, in pity to his poverty and degradation, had relieved him; that, knowing the severity of your aunt, and her

dislike to foreigners, you had permitted him to come at night to receive from a window the pecuniary aid you afforded: and then detail the fact of his forcible entrance, and the fearful catastrophe that followed. *Enfin*, tell the truth in all, except the circumstance of his ever having been more than a common acquaintance to you; and resolutely vow that he has invented this tale in order to extort money from you by threatening to circulate it, and to terrify you into a concealment of his guilt.

To carry my advice into effect demands great nerve and self-control; you used to possess both, but I fear they have deserted you now that you most need them. Remember you have no other means of extricating yourself from the trammels of this monster; so take courage, adopt my counsel, and all may yet be well.

Pauvre Florestan *est dans Saint Pelagie*,

and his cruel aunt refuses to pay his debts. I have sent all my jewels to be sold, and *le duc, comme un bon ami,* is raising money in order to procure his freedom. The first day he was arrested I was half dead with sorrow; for I fancied that my poor Florestan would be shut in a damp, dark cell, chained to the wall, fed on bread and water, and his hands confined. But I find it is no such thing: *au contraire,* Lisette, my *femme de chambre,* whom I sent to him, being too ill to go myself, tells me that he has a very comfortable apartment; had two or three friends, who are also confined there, to dinner, *un repas très recherché;* was served by a *restaurant* of the domicile; and, instead of his hands being secured, they are busily employed in playing *écarté* all the evening.

In short, as Lisette tells me, he leads a far more agreeable life there than he did in

this *triste maison*, where he, *pauvre garçon*, was as *ennuyé* as I am. He read to his friends the passage of my letter in which I detailed the horrors to which I fancied he was exposed; and Lisette says, they laughed heartily at my notions of St. Pelagie. How like Florestan—*n'est-ce pas?*—to preserve his gaiety even in a prison!

Adieu, *ma chère* Caroline! Remember, that true philosophy consists in enjoying the good one has attained, and not in lamenting the means used for its attainment; more especially when such retrospections cannot benefit. With your fortune I should have nothing to desire—or, at least, not desire any thing long that it could supply.

Tout à vous,

DELPHINE, MARQUISE DE VILLEROI.

FROM THE COUNTESS OF ANNANDALE TO LA MARQUISE DE VILLEROI.

We have come to London, *chère* Delphine, to which my husband was summoned the day after my last letter to you, by an express from the ministers, who wish him to take office. He is gratified by this distinction, and I like it because he does; for his affection has awakened a reciprocal feeling in my heart, which I had thought callous and steeled against soft emotions. But where is the nature that can resist the gentle influence of kindness? not in woman's heart, I am sure.

My first entrance into this house was very painful: how many scenes which I would wish to efface for ever from my memory, did it recall! Lord Annandale had, considerately, changed the arrangement of the whole house;

and the apartments appropriated to me are not those occupied by the dear, the wronged Augusta. The furniture, too, is all new; so that no vestige of its former mistress remains. Yet she is seldom absent from my memory; *that* recalls her mild and beautiful face to each apartment where she so lately dwelt in innocence and loveliness; *that* gives back the touching sound of her sweet voice and affectionate words; and renews, too, the cankering reflection, that I destroyed her.

Lord Annandale's son, the child of which she was so fond, was brought to me the day after my arrival. He came bounding into the room, and rushed to embrace me; but, on approaching near enough to distinguish my face, he stopped abruptly short, and said,—"No, it is not my own mamma!" and an expression of the deepest disappointment clouded his little face.

It is clear he still remembers her. Poor, dear Augusta! who that ever experienced her gentleness and affection, could ever forget her? I must not dwell on this theme, for every thought connected with her is fraught with sadness.

Already have all the ancient *habitués* of Annandale House flocked to my doors, with professions of friendship and smiles of welcome. But they find me changed — gravely, if not sadly changed: for I know them too well to esteem or respect them; and I wish to draw round me a circle widely different from theirs, composed of honourable and clever men, and virtuous and dignified women. Such are not rare in England, though they are not frequently to be met in the circle arrogating to itself the appellation of *exclusive* — an appellation I trust it will ever retain — keeping without its pale all the good and wise, whose

qualities must ever unfit them for belonging to it.

And yet, it was in this demoralised society that, a short year ago, I was ambitious to enter! But what changes may not a year produce? I have learned to appreciate virtue, by having strayed from its path; and discovered the hollowness, the deformity of vice, by having, unhappily, approached it too nearly.

How erroneously would persons judge of the English character, who formed their opinions of it from that class among which I formerly lived in London — a class which affects all the frivolity of French society, but which has none of its redeeming qualities — its gaiety, wit, or ease! The more conscious I am of my own demerits, the more do I desire to avoid intimacy with those who are unworthy, and to dwell henceforth among persons I can respect and esteem.

Who can love virtue like those who have experienced the misery produced by vice? Ah, none! and I would fain cling to it (though deeply conscious of my unworthiness), even as the wrecked mariner clings to the shore from which the waves are bearing him.

I am to be presented at court to-morrow, and am to wear, for the first time, the family jewels. It seems like yesterday that I saw poor Augusta wear them on her presentation, when her beauty attracted all eyes. Where is she now? But I must not dwell on this thought.

An aunt of Lord Annandale is to present me; an excellent old lady, and universally beloved and respected. She was absent from England when her nephew married poor Augusta, so never saw her; which is, perhaps, the reason why she is partial to me, not being able to compare me with one so every way

my superior. Lady Wilmington is an especial favourite at court, and numbers among her friends the most estimable of the aristocracy, whose acquaintance she has already procured for me.

The Comtesse of Hohenlinden has left England, which I rejoice at; and her *coterie* here console themselves for the humiliating flatteries they administered to her when present, by the lavish abuse they bestow on her in her absence. Lord Annandale has quite set his heart on my making a brilliant appearance to-morrow; he has even superintended the preparations for my *toilette*, and wishes me to wear, in addition to the family jewels, some valuable ones which he has given me.

I shall leave this letter unfinished, that I may write to you, to-morrow, the details of my presentation.

* * * * *

Again, Delphine, the wretch who poisons my existence has asserted his fearful authority over me! and this time in a manner that convinces me I have nothing to hope from his forbearance.

Lord Annandale dined with the ministers yesterday; and I was sitting in my boudoir, superintending the arrangement of some diamonds which my maid was attaching to my court-dress, when the groom of the chambers announced le Chevalier Carency, and that monster entered.

The case of jewels I held in my hand fell to the ground, and I uttered a faint shriek; while Claudine, who, in the elegantly dressed man of fashion before her, did not recognise the mysterious visitant of Annandale Castle, respectfully retired. He approached me with alacrity, kissed my hand with easy politeness, and said that, having only that day arrived

from Paris, he came to deliver a letter, and sundry messages, from our mutual friend, la Marquise de Villeroi. Though I dreaded finding myself alone with him, I dreaded still more the possibility of Claudine's recognising him, if suffered to remain, or to be a witness to an interview in which I felt a presentiment that new demands would be made; so I was glad to see her withdraw. I then asked him why he stood before me?

"The question is neither polite nor hospitable, *ma belle comtesse*," replied he, with an air of the most insulting familiarity; "*mais n'importe*. I am no longer the ruined mendicant you saw at Annandale Castle, and whose apparition seemed to give you so little pleasure. Your compulsory liberality has enabled me to reassume that place in society to which my birth entitles me: I flatter myself that my appearance would not discredit the most aris-

tocratic *salon* in London;" and he looked in a large mirror with undisguised complacency. "But Fortune owes me a grudge, and pursues me with a *guignon* as provoking as it is inconvenient. Last night I lost a considerable sum, the final remnant of your supply, and I am come to demand another. Seeing in the papers that *monsieur milord*, *votre mari*, was to dine with the ministers (for the English papers leave us ignorant of none of the engagements of *les messieurs et dames à la mode*), I determined on paying you a visit. Should *milord* arrive before I depart, you will, of course, present me to him as an old friend just arrived from Paris, and the bearer of a letter from your friend, la Marquise de Villeroi. *Sa seigneurie* will, of course, act *l'aimable* —I, *le gentil:* the acquaintance thus made, leave the rest to me: he shall present me to the persons I desire to know, and all will go

off *à merveille*. I see that you disapprove this arrangement," added he, with a look of perfect nonchalance; "but I have taken it into my head to enter into fashionable society in London, and your husband is the person I have selected as *chaperon*."

"And you tell this to me," said I, my blood boiling with indignation; "to me, who know you for a robber — for an assassin!"

His countenance assumed a fearful expression of malice as he glanced at me, and replied,—

"Bah, bah! you still remember that little episode; but you appear to forget your own share in it. Who gave me ingress to the house, and who secured my egress from it? Without your aid, I could not have effected the objects to which you refer. But let that pass; I am not here to listen to your tragical

reminiscences. I am come for money, and *must* have it quickly."

I declared that he had taken all my funds at Annandale Castle, and that I had no more.

"What! can you not ask your husband? He is still too short a time married to have ceased to be uxorious enough to be generous to you;" and he looked at me in a way that brought the blood to my cheeks.

"But there is no occasion to have recourse to his liberality," said he, "while these baubles can be converted into money," taking up the diamonds that lay scattered around; "they will do quite as well."

"They must not — cannot be yours!" said I; "they are the family jewels, in which I have only a life-interest."

"Bah, bah!" answered he, "I stand on no such idle ceremony."

As he spoke, he gathered up the scattered

diamonds, placed them in the case, and put it within his coat, which he buttoned over it. In vain I implored him not to take them, and promised to send him money the very next day. He was deaf to my entreaties; and, having said that, shortly, he would call again, and be presented to *milord*, he rang the bell, and, when the domestic arrived, took a respectful leave of me, and departed.

I am utterly confounded; and so agitated, by contending emotions, that I am incapable of thinking. Though the jewels are of great value, my husband attaches even more importance to them from the number of years they have been in the family, than from their intrinsic worth. How shall I be able to conceal that I no longer possess them? How get off appearing at court to-morrow? I am all in a tremor! I must lie down, for my head swims, and I can scarcely support myself.

Delphine, I would prefer death to seeing this wretch intrude himself into the presence of my husband, to remind me of a crime I would give worlds to forget, and the memory of which, ever since I became a wife, is more hateful to me than ever. Think of a miscreant, stained with theft — with murder — finding himself beneath the roof of an honourable man, and *I* tacitly sanctioning his monstrous effrontery by my silence! O God, have pity on me!

Lord Annandale found me so ill when he returned, that he was the first to propose my abandoning all thought of going to the drawing-room to-day.

This is a reprieve; but, alas! a brief one; for in ten days more there will be another, and I shall be expected to go. The kindness of my husband melts me to tears—and this was the man I judged so harshly! How my heart

reproaches me; and how I wish I were more worthy of his affection!

When Claudine asked me, last night, for the diamonds to fasten on my dress, I felt my cheeks glow as I told her that I had locked them up.

"*Madame la comtesse's* illness was very sudden," observed she; "for I thought I had not seen *sa seigneurie* so well for a long time as just before that gentleman arrived."

I was painfully conscious that I again changed countenance.

"It was strange, *madame la comtesse*," resumed she, "that the tones of his voice, and the air of that gentleman, quite startled me, by reminding me of that terrible man who came to *le château d'Annandale*."

Think how I trembled!

"One often does see such strange resemblances," continued she. "This gentleman is

about the same height, but he has no whiskers; and then he has not a patch over his eye. *Enfin*, this is a *grand seigneur*, and the other was like a mendicant. Still one reminds me of the other."

How I writhed while she spoke! I think I can perceive — but it may be only my timid sense of guilt that suggests the apprehension — that she already associates in her mind the visit of this man, my sudden indisposition, and the disappearance of the diamonds.

My position is a fearful one, and becomes every day more precarious. The state of incessant agitation and alarm in which this wretch plunges me has destroyed my health; and there are moments when I feel such a total prostration of physical as well as moral strength, that I am led to think I cannot long sustain this life of wretchedness. This man is my scourge—the avenger of all my sins. Oh!

may the Almighty accept the pangs I now endure as some atonement for my transgressions, and limit my suffering to this life; permitting me to hope that, in the life to come, I may be pardoned.

Should my prophetic forebodings be realised—should death soon end the insupportable anguish I endure, I entreat — nay, more, I command you, Delphine, to make known to Lord and Lady Vernon, and Lord Annandale, the perfect innocence of the wronged Augusta.

To-day, Delphine, De Carency presented himself in due form at my door. The audacity of this man is not to be imagined. On hearing that I was indisposed, and not visible, he inquired for Lord Annandale, and sent in his card; was shewn into the library, and acted *l'aimable* so adroitly to my husband, representing himself as an old friend of mine, and the bearer of sundry messages to me from you,

that he received an invitation to dine here on Thursday.

When Lord Annandale came to my dressing-room, and related the interview he had just had, I thought I should have fallen from my chair; but he was fastening one of the studs of his chemise, so did not observe my agitation.

"The expression of le Chevalier Carency's face does not please me," said Lord Annandale; "but his manners are remarkably insinuating, notwithstanding a certain *brusquerie* that occasionally breaks forth, indicating that he has spent most of his time in camps. But you say nothing of your friend, dearest, though he professes to have known you since your childhood?"

Think, Delphine, what must have been my feelings!

I said, that I certainly had known him

in my early youth, but that I did not like him.

"Yet, we must be civil to him," replied Lord Annandale; "or he will return to Paris, and tell the Marquise de Villeroi that you behave ill to your former friends. It is astonishing how soon foreigners make themselves *au fait* of what is passing in every country they visit," continued Lord Annandale, musingly: "le Chevalier de Carency said some very civil and judicious things, too, about my speech in the House, the other night. By Jove! he understood the bearing of the question wonderfully. He certainly is very clever; and must have been a devilish good-looking fellow, too, *malgré* the *satanique* expression of his eyes and mouth."

The wretch has already discovered the *côté faible* of my husband, and has availed himself of it most dexterously, if I may judge by the favourable impression he has made;

for Lord Annandale has more than once recurred to what he terms the judicious observations of the chevalier.

Oh, why should vanity, the sole defect in his nature, thus render him the dupe of the vicious and designing! It was by this medium that I acquired an empire over him; and now, one still more unworthy, and still more capable of making the vilest use of it, seems likely to obtain a similar influence. And it is through me that he is brought in contact with this atrocious man! yet I dare not reveal his real character, nor terminate an acquaintance from which I predict some fatal result. Yes, I *will* watch over my husband, and endeavour, if possible, to preserve him from the pollution of this wretch's society. Let him wreak his worst vengeance on me, in preference to injuring this, the only being on earth who loves me.

When I reflect how encompassed I am by the snares of this dreadful man, I feel as if in a dream; and when I hear my husband talk of him, in utter unconsciousness of his real character, I shudder, lest he should, by any fatality, ever be brought into hostile collision with such a monster.

I am continually placed in embarrassing situations with regard to money. No later than this day, Lord Annandale told me that he had put his name to a subscription for the relief of a very deserving family, reduced to poverty by the sudden death of a father who had held a clerkship in a public office too short a time to be entitled to a pension; and he recommended me to subscribe also.

"Shall I send your money with mine?" asked he.

The consciousness of not having a guinea at my command made me feel, and look too,

so embarrassed, that he appeared surprised, and added,—" Perhaps you disapprove of the system of subscribing; and, if so, I will not urge your compliance."

He must think me mean, illiberal, and uncharitable, not to have given the money; but it is better that he should entertain this opinion than know that all the funds which his liberality bestowed on me have been expended to purchase the silence of a wretch; or know me for what I am—a degraded, a lost woman—dependent for my position in society on the dearly-bought forbearance of the vilest and most detestable of his sex. I tremble at the thought of meeting this wretch on Thursday; but it would be still worse to have Lord Annandale exposed to his machinations. You shall hear the result of our interview.

Adieu! *Votre*

CAROLINE.

FROM LA MARQUISE DE VILLEROI TO THE COUNTESS OF ANNANDALE.

I REALLY begin to be alarmed, *ma chère* Caroline, at the audacious pertinacity with which De Carency pursues you. He has discovered your dread of him, and will make it a profitable source for levying contributions. I know not what to advise, unless it be that you induce milord to accompany you to Paris, where, should the vile wretch De Carency follow you, we could easily manage to have him thrown into prison. We have only to get some person to swear that he had been seen hovering near the Tuileries with an air-gun in the shape of a cane, or lurking on the route to Neuilly with a pistol in his pocket, and you will be troubled by him no more. Five Louis, judiciously disposed of, will

quicken the sight of as many persons of *le bas peuple* here, and enable them to see any thing their employer suggests.

Imaginez vous mon malheur, ma chère amie! —ma mère est morte. But that is not all: she has left the whole of her fortune to *le père* Maubois!

This is, indeed, a heavy blow; and *pauvre* Florestan and I are nearly overwhelmed by it. I have long expected that she would have bequeathed a considerable portion of her wealth to her Jesuitical confessor; but, that she would leave him all, never entered into my mind.

The only legacy I have received is a letter filled with reproaches for my extravagance and errors, and an exhortation to turn from my evil courses ere it be too late. My *liaison* with the *duc* she stigmatises as a crime of the deepest die, meriting opprobrium here,

and perdition hereafter. In short, never was there such an epistle. It is, however, well calculated to preclude any very deep regret for the writer; though it prevents not my chagrin for the loss of my fortune. *Quelle mère dénaturée!*

Ma tante, avec cette douceur et cette amabilité qui la distinguent, appears more gratified than grieved by our cruel disappointment. She knows that we are now wholly in her power, and hers is not a nature to use that power generously. How right you were, *ma chère* Caroline, when you pronounced her to be *aussi méchante que bête!*

I must leave you, as *ma couturière* has come to take my orders for my mourning. How I hate black! for it makes me look so ill. I shall resume my letter when Victorine departs.

Only fancy what has occurred,— never was there such a piece of meanness! *Madame ma tante* came into the room where I had left my unfinished letter to you, while I was giving my instructions to Victorine for my mourning, and had the want of decency to read what I had written. She was frantic with rage at the mention made of herself in it, and vows vengeance against me and you.

You, fortunately, are out of her reach; but on poor me it will fall heavily. It was very unthinking of me to leave the letter open upon my desk; but who could dream of her being guilty of so reprehensible an action as that of reading the letter of another? and beneath her own roof, too! What a violation of the rights of hospitality and decorum!

She declares she will reveal my *liaison* with the *duc* to Florestan. Little does she imagine

that it has long been no secret to him: he, *pauvre cher homme*, was always reasonable, and adopted the philosophical system which takes for its motto, *vivre et laissez vivre*.

This ancient dame was positively transformed into a fury by the perusal of my letter. She looked a very Megara, with her bleared eyes, and withered cheeks flushed to crimson by the violence of her anger.

"*I, bête! I, méchante!*" exclaimed she; "what a vile calumny! and this, too, from you, base and ungrateful woman! who owe me so much — on whom I have lavished such generosity and kindness. Yes, your mother was right to disinherit you. She knew your wickedness, and has punished you in the only vulnerable point — your love of wealth. The example shall not be lost, depend upon it. The *méchante bête* shall find means to repay you for all your sins!"

Thus saying, she left the room, darting at me the most infuriated glances.

I have reflected long and deeply on the subject, and now pronounce, that all the evils in this life emanate from poverty. Were I in possession of the fortune to which I had a right, this old Tisiphone could not insult and humiliate me; Florestan would not be in a prison, and *I* should not be wretched — for wretched I am — at this moment. Should she expel me from her house, I know not where to go, unless to the Comtesse de Hauteforte's; and she, of late, has been so negligent in writing to me, and so altered in her manner, when I have called on her, that the alternative is far from being an agreeable one.

I will despatch *ma femme de chambre*, in whom I can confide, with a letter detailing my vexatious position to *le duc; he* will sympathise with me, for on his affection I can count,—

and this is indeed a consolation under present annoyances. I have seldom seen him of late, for my aunt, not content with prohibiting his visits at her hotel, has so strenuously insisted on my not meeting him elsewhere, that, to preserve peace in her *triste maison*, I have only rarely had an interview with him at Madame de Hauteforte's, who affected to be prudish about it. This conduct is *un peu ridicule*, *n'est-ce-pas ?*—having so long known our attachment: and not a little ungrateful, considering that I have always thrown the shield of my friendship over her equivocal *liaison* with my husband. I was, also, much hurt by observing the indifference she has evinced with regard to Florestan's incarceration. She even permitted herself to make some ill-timed reflections on his extravagant habits, and incorrigible propensity to gaming; which came with a bad grace from her, who had profited so

frequently and so largely by his profuse generosity. Since our change of fortune, I have discovered that people are much less cordial and friendly than formerly; and I begin to believe that the friendships formed in gay society are not endowed with much stability. Alas! why should we only acquire wisdom by misfortune? the severity of the school is not compensated by the value of the knowledge acquired in it.

A letter from *ma tante* — the most cruel, the most reproachful, that ever was written. She orders me to leave her house; and adds, that a *méchante bête* can be no fit associate for a lady so *spirituelle* as I am. The truth of that unlucky phrase she cannot forgive; proving the correctness of the old proverb which says, that "it is only the truth that offends."

I know not what to do, nor where to go.

Friends on whom, previously to our pecuniary embarrassments, I thought I might safely count, have all looked so coldly on me since that epoch, that my pride revolts from seeking their aid in this hour of need. The *duc* is, I know, of late, greatly straitened in his own finances; therefore, from him I can expect little more than sympathy and affection. There is no one to whom I can apply, except *la* Comtesse de Hautefort, who has received too many proofs of kindness from me, and of generosity from my husband, not to evince hospitality to me under my present distressing circumstances. How mortifying, how humiliating, to be reduced to so painful a dilemma!

Bless your stars, *chère* Caroline, that you are rich; for, to a proud spirit, there is no evil like poverty: nay, it includes all the others.

I have no money, for your generous loan

I sent to poor Florestan; who, alas! in his imprudence, has squandered it all away in giving *recherché* dinners in St. Pelagie. *Mais, après tout*, I cannot much blame the poor fellow; for there are so few ways of passing the time in that wretched place, that it is not either very surprising or very reprehensible that he should have fallen into this folly, *pour s'amuser*.

Florestan was always so indulgent to my weaknesses, that it would be inexcusable of me not to extend a similar forbearance to his. Poor Florestan! You may laugh at me as much as you please, Caroline; ay, as much as in days of yore, when you used to say that our love resembled that of *une couple bourgeoise*, rather than the polite indifference of two persons of *la haute noblesse:* but I do still retain a sentiment of affection towards my husband, that might, had we never lived in

the gay society of Paris, have formed the happiness of us both. *Mais, à quoi bon ces tristes reflexions?* And yet our position is well calculated to give rise to such, — Florestan the inmate of a prison, where evil example corrupts and debases the mind, rendering vicious companionship and loose indulgences, which at first disgusted him, habitual; and I driven with insult from the shelter of his aunt's roof, to seek one beneath that of — his mistress!

To be sure my present abode never proved otherwise than disagreeable; still I would prefer it to that of Madame de Hauteforte's, whose coldness and *hauteur* of late have displeased me. Do you know, *ma chère*, that *malgré* all my boasted philosophy, I could sit down and weep at the painful embarrassment in which I find myself, but I am preserved from this unavailing weakness by the reflection that, were I to weep until I became a second Niobe, my position

would not be ameliorated: *au contraire*, I should only spoil my eyes, which are one of the few advantages still left to me, and few people are disposed to serve ugly or *larmoyantes* women. Having lost my fortune, I must not also lose my good looks; and though I am your affectionate, must not become your ugly friend,

DELPHINE, MARQUISE DE VILLEROI.

THE COUNTESS OF ANNANDALE TO LA MARQUISE DE VILLEROI.

NEVER, *chère* Delphine, shall I forget what I have endured this evening, in the society of that miscreant de Carency!

He presented himself, dressed perfectly *à-la-mode;* and, strange to say, has resumed the air and tone of good company so completely, that, on listening to, and regarding

him, I could scarcely imagine that he was the coarse and brutalised ruffian I beheld in the country. He approached me without the slightest symptom of embarrassment; delivered several amiable messages purporting to come from you; and referred to our ancient friendship in Italy, in a manner to induce the persons present to suppose that he must be one of my chosen friends.

How I felt my cheeks glow at his allusion to the most fatal event of my life — my acquaintance with this monster! But, instead of being diverted from the subject by my evident distress, he seemed to have a pleasure in exercising this species of torture over me, probably in revenge for the marked coldness of my manner towards him.

We had several people to dinner, to many of whom Lord Annandale presented him; and he acted the agreeable so effectually, that I

saw, with secret horror, that he was establishing an acquaintance with them by the most assiduous attentions and animated conversation.

He sat next Lady Godalming — the fastidious and hypercritical Lady Godalming — and displayed so much tact in the judicious compliments rather implied than expressed to her, that I heard her offer him a ticket for Almack's, and invite him to her next *soirée*. Good heavens! could she but imagine the crimes of this man, how would she shrink from the possibility of meeting him!

During dinner, more than once I anxiously and stealthily observed the servants, to endeavour to infer from their looks whether, like my *femme de chambre*, they suspected, if they had not detected, the identity of the well-dressed man of fashion before them and the unsightly ruffian whose ferocity had filled

them with fear and disgust: but, fortunately, they seemed to entertain no suspicions.

When cards were introduced in the evening, he made one of the whist-table of the Marquess of Haverfordwest, whose opinion he conciliated by approving his play, and referring, with a deferential air, to his judgment. He lost; and, when paying, displayed a case well stocked with notes to a large amount, the sight of which seemed to establish his claims to the consideration of not a few of those around him. Lord Haverfordwest immediately invited him to his house; and Lord Derbyshire, in his most insinuating tone, told him that he would get him elected an honorary member of the Travellers' Club, where, as he evidently liked a rubber of whist, he might find one every night.

"*Le Chevalier* is a very agreeable man," said Lord Haverfordwest to me; "but a very

indifferent whist-player. I foresee that he will become popular in London; for he loses his money without, as is too often the case, losing his temper also; and pays his twenties and fifties with more *sang-froid* than other men exhibit in losing their guineas. Yes, he will be vastly popular, I foresee."

"What a very *distingué* personage your friend, le Chevalier de Carency, is," remarked Lady Godalming. "He is of the noble family De Carency, near Turin, is he not? How easy it is to see that he is one of *l'ancienne noblesse*; that *ton de bonne compagnie*, that air *comme il faut*, and, above all, the tact with which he insinuates, rather than pays, a compliment. Yes, these *agremens* are only to be found in the descendants of the ancient *noblesse*."

So, here is the fastidious Lady Godalming caught by his flattery; and the supercilious Lord Haverfordwest, one of the most influen-

tial leaders of fashionable society, conciliated by this artful and designing man's affectation of being a bad whist-player, who loses his money freely, and can pay when he loses. Even so long ago as the period when he was at Florence, he had the reputation of being an adept at whist; consequently, I am persuaded his careless play was all a *ruse*, to deceive those around him.

He found means to approach me, during the evening, and murmured in my ear,—

"Beware how you venture to display the *fierté* and coldness with which you have treated me this day; for I have the power, ay, and the inclination too, if you provoke me to it, to take ample vengeance on you."

While uttering this audacious threat, the shameless dissembler was smiling as gaily and as insinuatingly as though he were addressing to me the most elegant compliments.

But, in spite of the indignation which his atrocious tyranny excited in me, I felt the dread influence he exercises over me; and that, though in a splendid home, and surrounded by the great and noble, I was only his puppet — the enslaved, debased concealer, if not the abettor, of the crimes of the foulest and most loathsome monster that ever disgraced mankind.

Every sound of his voice makes me tremble; every glance of his eye, like that of the basilisk, transfixes his victim. I know not how my agitation escaped general remark: but Lord Annandale alone spoke of it; and *he* attributed it to my recent indisposition. I thought the party would never have terminated; and, when at length they went away, a violent hysterical attack, with which I was seized, alarmed my dear and kind husband so much, that he sent for my physician, who prescribed

quiet and repose — two blessings that are only for those free from guilt, and which never more will be mine on earth. Well might I have exclaimed, when the doctor was recommending restoratives, and gentle opiates,—

> " Can'st thou not minister to a mind diseased;
> Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow;
> Raze out the written troubles of the brain;
> And, with some sweet, oblivious antidote,
> Cleanse the stuffed bosom of that perilous stuff
> Which weighs upon the heart?"

Little do those around me dream of the terrific thraldom in which I, the object of envy to so many, am placed. Yet there is one whose eye is often upon me, and with an expression of suspicious scrutiny beneath which mine never fails to drop. This vigilant observer is, I scarcely need add, Claudine. Her whole manner towards me is changed ever since De Carency's visit to Annandale Castle.

There is a want of respect in it; yet a sort of pity, too, even more humiliating than her familiarity. I have her as little near me as possible, and she perceives that our separation is intentionally arranged by me; a slight which piques her into increased *brusquerie*. Oh, the misery, the degradation of being subjected to the insolence of our own menials! But what is this minor misery in comparison with the overwhelming ones that I must endure? Delphine, this state of things cannot long continue; I feel as if the principle of life was giving way beneath the fearful mental sufferings to which I am a prey, and as if reason were tottering on her throne.

Adieu, *chère* Delphine, I am too ill to add more than that I am always your affectionate friend, CAROLINE.

THE COUNTESS OF ANNANDALE TO LA MARQUISE DE VILLEROI.

I WRITE to you, *ma chère* Delphine, while Lord Annandale is at the House of Lords: I have given orders to be denied to all visitors, and find a relief in unburdening my overcharged breast to you.

But first let me express, though I can only faintly do so, how deeply, how truly, I deplore the painful circumstances in which you and poor Florestan are placed. I must, however, do more than sympathise with you, *ma pauvre chère amie.* The five thousand pounds bequeathed me by the dear and wronged Augusta, shall be forthwith remitted to Paris, and placed at your disposal. If it be sufficient to extricate Florestan from prison I shall rejoice; if not, it will, at all events, conduce to

render his *sejour* in that melancholy abode less annoying, and leave you less dependent on his aunt. Do not wrong me, *chère* Delphine, by supposing that I could now smile, as in past times, at the affection of Florestan and yourself. Far from it; I would conjure you both to cultivate it to the utmost, convinced, as I now am, that happiness is to be found alone in domestic love, — the only love that is free from sorrow or reproach.

A parcel has just been brought me, containing the most beautiful pair of diamond bracelets imaginable, a gift from Lord Annandale. How he overpowers me with generosity and tenderness, of which I know myself to be so unworthy! How strange and inscrutable is the human heart! If, when I formed my vile and wicked scheme of destroying the reputation of the pure, the sainted Augusta, in

order to take her place, any one had told me that I should ever entertain the affection for Lord Annandale which I now feel, I should have smiled in derision at the seeming improbability. Yet I do love him — not, it is true, with the wild and enthusiastic passion of early youth, but with a tenderness and a gratitude which continued kindness could alone excite. This new-born sentiment adds to my misery, by making me tremble at the possibility of the loss of his — a misfortune inevitable, should he discover my crimes.

A letter from Paris, but the superscription is not in your hand, so I shall let it remain unopened for the present.

Hark! I hear some one coming; it must be — it is, my dear, my kind husband.

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LA MARQUISE DE VILLEROI TO THE COUNTESS OF ANNANDALE.

PLAIGNEZ moi, ma chère Caroline, car je suis la plus malheureuse de femmes. Deceived by him I trusted, by him for whom I incurred my mother's lasting displeasure and my own reproach. I am wretched, and I know not where to turn for consolation.

I told you in my last that I had written to the *duc*, to inform him of the disagreeable dilemma in which I am placed, and to state my intention of seeking an asylum at the Comtesse de Hauteforte's. When Lisette returned from his hotel, I perceived an expression of mingled anger and grief in her countenance, that I fancied boded me no good; and when I tore open the letter, alas! my fears were but too well confirmed. His mode of address-

ing me was so constrained, so cold and ceremonious, that I had not perused three lines of his note before I felt convinced he no longer loved me. I questioned Lisette as to the cause of her changed aspect; dreading, yet impatient to learn, if it had any reference to the *duc*, or if she could explain the cause of his estrangement. My reiterated commands to tell me *all* she knew, drew from her the confession that François, the *valet de chambre* of the *duc*, who had long since promised her marriage, had treated her with the utmost coldness and disdain. The poor creature wept bitterly while she related her lover's cruelty. He had told her that the *duc* had commanded him to break off his attachment to mademoiselle Lisette, and to transfer it to the *femme de chambre* of the lady with whom he, the *duc*, is at present in love. Think, *chère* Caroline, what I felt at hearing this! The blood receded

from my tortured heart, and rushed to my brain, which has ever since throbbed with agony.

"I told François, *madame la marquise*," resumed Lisette, "that if *monsieur le duc* was faithless, that was no excuse for *his* being so, and reminded him of all the promises he had made me; but, would *madame la marquise* believe it, the perfidious François said, that he must obey his master's orders; and added, that he had only offered his vows to me because the *duc* commanded him, it being the general usage for the *valet de chambre* to form an attachment to the *femme de chambre* of the lady preferred by his master."

How was my pride and delicacy wounded by this speech of the weeping Lisette! I really felt ashamed to meet her eye.

"*Ah! madame la marquise*," sobbed she, "*nous sommes bien à plaindre, car nous sommes toutes les deux trompées; vous, par le maître; et*

moi, par le valet. Ah! les hommes, les hommes! ils sont tous de même, et nous sommes toujours leurs dupes! I endeavoured, but, alas! in vain, *madame,* to discover who the lady is to whom *monsieur le duc* is at present attached, in order that I might know who my rival is, but *ce perfide* François refused to give me the slightest clue. *Ah! le vilain homme, comme il m'a trompé!*"

Who can it be that has seduced the faithless *duc* from his allegiance? Yes, it is, it must be, the Duchesse de Harfleur. I now remember he used to praise her beauty; and I, fool that I was, joined in his admiration. Again I have perused his letter. He advises me to leave no means untried in order to effect a reconciliation with *ma tante,* and on no account to seek an asylum with the Comtesse de Hauteforte. He never liked her, or approved of my friendship for her; but what

interest can he now have in where I go, or what becomes of me? Ah! I guess the motive for his advice. He knows that the Duchesse de Harfleur is on habits of intimacy with the Comtesse de Hauteforte; and dreads that, beneath her roof, I should become acquainted with his perfidy. I will instantly go to her, for she is now my sole refuge. *She*, at least, will pity, if she cannot console me.

I am distracted, Caroline! My brain burns, and my heart throbs nearly to bursting. Never was there such deception, such baseness, as that to which I have been made the victim! But let me relate the particulars to you while I have yet strength to do so, for the combined effects of conflicting passions have rendered me so ill, that I am almost incapable of the exertion.

I left off writing to you, to proceed to Madame de Hauteforte's — it maddens me to write her odious name. On arriving at her *porte cocher*, I saw the cabriolet of that false and heartless man, the *duc*, and instantly concluded that he had sought an interview with her thus early, to urge her to go and advise me to conciliate *ma tante*. Her porter told my servant that *madame la comtesse* was not at home; on hearing which, I assured him that his mistress would certainly receive *my* visit, although she excluded all others. He shook his head, looked incredulous, and I again repeated that the *comtesse* would be sure to receive me.

"I am very sorry to refuse *madame la marquise* the *entrée*," replied he, "*mais quoi faire? Madame la comtesse* has given strict orders that *no one* is to be admitted when

monsieur le duc is with her, and there is no day in which I am not compelled to send away visitors, but the fault is not mine."

Such was my rage and indignation, that I felt capable, at that moment, of committing any folly — nay, more, any crime. I longed to force my way to the presence of this perfidious pair, and to overwhelm them with my just reproaches; but, as I caught the glances of the porter, and my own servant, I was recalled to a sense of prudence, and determined on not exposing myself to their animadversions by any display of the jealousy and anger that was torturing me. I drove to St. Pelagie to see poor Florestan, and make him acquainted with the perfidy of both these wretches.

Had you seen him, Caroline, your heart, like mine, would have ached at the terrible change that has taken place in his appearance; and the still more terrible one in his habits and

manners. When I had informed him of what I came to relate, he burst into a frantic laugh, and then, for the first time, I discovered that he was intoxicated. Yes, Caroline, even at two o'clock in the afternoon he was in a state that at once alarmed and disgusted me.

"And so, my poor Delphine, you have been duped as well as I!" exclaimed he, his utterance impeded by a hiccough; "*mais soyez tranquille, chère amie, tu seras vengé, je t'en repond.*"

He lavished every possible term of reproach on the *duc* and *comtesse;* and revealed to me, that more than half his pecuniary embarrassments had been occasioned by the sums he had raised, at usurious interest, to extricate them from theirs. Yes, Caroline, I, who foolishly believed that the *duc* had, on more than one occasion, come forward to assist my poor Florestan, and felt grateful to him for it, have now ascertained

that he, like the vile object of his present preference, has plunged him in ruin.

Yet, in the midst of intoxication, and its debasing effects, the good heart and kind disposition of my poor husband shone conspicuous. I could have wept over his degradation, forgetful of my own, in the interest and pity he excited.

"*Oui, ma pauvre Delphine,*" said he, "*cette méchante coquine étoit toujours jalouse de toi — toi, qui étoit si gentille, si bon enfant, qui ne m'a jamais cherché querelle. Elle étoit fachée, quand je te donnois le plus petit cadeau, et avide d'en reçevoir elle même; mais je l'arrangerai, soyez en sure; et lui aussi, le coquin!*"

I have taken a lodging close to St. Pelagie, that I may be near my poor Florestan, the only friend I now have. I shall pass all my days with him during his incarceration, and endeavour to wean him from this dreadful

habit of intoxication, which has been, I am convinced, induced by solitude and depression of spirits. Why have I so long left him a prey to their influence? I hear a noise — a cry and weeping; what can it be?

Madame la comtesse,—It has become my painful task to conclude the letter of my unfortunate niece. She is no more! having closed her errors by a crime that has plunged us all in terror and dismay. Yes, madame, a life of folly has been terminated by suicide. Her unhappy husband, my nephew, having fallen, mortally wounded, by the sword of her seducer, the wretched wife struck by horror and remorse, has destroyed herself by laudanum. How far your evil example and counsel may have tended to produce this fearful catastrophe, I leave your own conscience to

determine. Do not stifle its whispers ; but, ere it be too late, turn from your wickedness, and seek, by repentance, to make your peace with an offended God.

Your voluminous correspondence with my unfortunate niece I have looked over, sealed up, and addressed to Lord Vernon, the bereaved father, who owes to your vile machinations the stain cast on the honour of his innocent daughter, and, eventually, that daughter's death. I was tempted to consign these proofs of your duplicity and wickedness to the husband you have duped, and whose name you dishonour ; but, on reflection, I have refrained from so doing, to prove that I am not "*aussi méchante que bête*," as you pronounced me to be.

You, madam, have ever piqued yourself on your *ésprit*. Let me now ask you, what have been its results ? Ruin, dishonour, and death,

to all whose destiny you could influence, and to yourself, —— But no, I leave your fate unpredicted; for it needs no sibyl's prescience to divine, that it must be as dark as your crimes.

ELEONORE, DUCHESSE DE CHATEAUNEUF.

FROM THE MARQUESS OF NOTTINGHAM TO EDWARD MORDAUNT, ESQ.

MY DEAR MORDAUNT, — Recalled to England by the dangerous illness of my sister, I find myself again in London, after more than a year's absence, with broken health, and spirits so depressed, as to render a sojourn in this gay metropolis most uncongenial to my feelings. Though the grief that drove me from my native land has been calmed by time and reason, enough of old regrets remain to unfit me from mingling with those from whom I

can expect no sympathy, and whose presence awakens only painful recollections.

My first inquiries have been for Lord and Lady Vernon. They are, God be thanked! better than I dared to hope. The Delawards have devoted much of their time to console them; and they have succeeded in reconciling them to the decrees of Providence, the more easily from the conviction the excellent and bereaved parents feel, of being, ere long, re-united to her they have lost.

Lady Delaward is the mother of a daughter, whom she has named Augusta, and to whom Lord and Lady Vernon are fondly attached.

You have, of course, heard that Annandale is married to Miss Montressor. Does not this union explain the motive of the scheme against the honour and peace of the wronged and innocent being I deplore? a scheme in which, even from the commencement, I suspected Miss

Montressor to be implicated. I shuddered on hearing of the unholy nuptials. Unhappy Annandale! how has he been duped! He,

> " Like the base Judean, threw a pearl away,
> Richer than all his tribe!"

My sister's malady has assumed a more favourable aspect, and her physicians think that the influence of a milder climate may restore her to health. I shall accompany her to Italy, and devote all my time and attention to this, the only tie that now binds me to life.

A most fearful piece of intelligence has this moment been communicated to me. How inscrutable are the ways of Providence! Annandale is no more. He has been murdered by the Chevalier de Carency—the seducer of the wife has been the assassin of the husband. Lord Calderwood has given me the particulars

of this horrid affair, and has been with one or two friends of the family to Annandale House, and heard the depositions of the servants. The evidence of the *femme de chambre* of the wretched Lady Annandale proves, that having entertained suspicions disadvantageous to the Chevalier de Carency, she had communicated them to the *valet de chambre;* and both agreed, when that wretch insisted on seeing their lady (though informed by the porter that she was not visible), to remain in waiting in the anteroom, where they could overhear what occurred. The *valet* and *femme de chambre* state, that on *le chevalier's* entering the chamber, he reproached the countess, in terms of gross insolence, for having refused to receive him. Lady Annandale spoke in so low a tone of voice that they heard not her reply, but he menaced her loudly and violently. They distinctly heard him demand money from her;

and, shortly after, exultingly exclaim, "It is well! these diamonds shall be mine." Lady Annandale appeared greatly agitated, entreated him not to take the diamonds, promising that, if he returned them to her, she would, on the next day, give him the money he required; but he refused to comply with her request. They heard the unhappy woman exclaim, "On my knees, I entreat you—I implore you, restore to me the bracelets! my husband will expect to see them, and, if I cannot produce them, I shall be ruined."

At this moment they heard Lord Annandale ascend the stairs; and they had only time to retreat into another room when they heard him struggling with *le chevalier*, and the countess uttering frantic cries. They gave the alarm; the servants rushed into the room, and discovered their lord mortally wounded by a poniard, and his wretched wife senseless on the

body of her murdered husband. The assassin was seized after a desperate resistance ; and on his person was found a pair of diamond bracelets, which had that day been presented to Lady Annandale by her lord, as was proved by an unfinished letter open on her table.

The suite of apartments occupied by *le chevalier,* at a fashionable hotel, have been searched ; and several valuable articles of jewellery, since recognised by the *femme de chambre* as having belonged to her mistress, as well as various other trinkets, were found, which, it is supposed, will lead to the discovery of other crimes.

The vile assassin is committed to prison, and an inquest is now being held on the body of the unfortunate Annandale. To-morrow we shall hear the result. My nerves have been greatly shaken by this horrid catastrophe, which has excited general consternation in

London. The wretched Lady Annandale has been delirious ever since the murder; and her health has lately been so much impaired, that her recovery is doubtful.

I send you the particulars of the evidence that transpired at the inquest.

The coroner's inquest has brought in a verdict of wilful murder against le Chevalier de Carency, who is committed to prison. The *femme de chambre* stated, on her examination, that she saw this man, for the first time, about a year and a quarter ago, in the village of Langley, near to which the countess was then residing with her aunt: that he at that period appeared in a state of the most abject poverty, and attracted her notice, as being a very suspicious-looking person. The next morning the aunt of the countess was found strangled in her bed,—her escritoire and jewel-case rifled; and,

though the doors and windows of the house were all found fastened on the inside, which precluded the belief that the murderer could have entered or left the house, she still had, more than once, associated the dreadful event with the apparition of the suspicious-looking man she had seen that day in the village. The steward of the murdered lady was tried for, and convicted of the murder, owing to a ring and bank-note belonging to her having been found in his possession.

About seven weeks ago, the prisoner came to Annandale Castle, disguised in a light-coloured wig and large mustaches. He inquired for the *femme de chambre*, and gave her a letter for her lady, which he insisted on her delivering, in a very peremptory tone. She thought she recognised him; but the change in the colour of his hair and mustaches made her doubtful.

Her mistress was exceedingly agitated on receiving the letter, and seemed greatly alarmed and apprehensive. That night she gave her a packet, which felt as if it contained bank-notes, to deliver to the prisoner when he called the next day; which order she fulfilled. Her lady never appeared the same since; but was always apprehensive and nervous. The servants, who saw the prisoner at Annandale Castle, remarked his bad countenance and suspicious looks.

Soon after the family came to London, Claudine Gauchet was in the boudoir of her ladyship, attaching some diamonds to the sleeves of a court dress, to be worn next day at the drawing-room, when the prisoner was announced. The countess became so agitated, on seeing him enter, that she let fall the *écrin* containing the jewels. The prisoner was dressed like a *grand seigneur*, and had left off

his light-coloured wig, whiskers, and mustaches. The countess dismissed Claudine, though the latter could see that her ladyship dreaded an interview with the prisoner.

In an hour after she was summoned to her lady, whom she found much indisposed; and never since saw the diamonds, until she recognised some of them which were found in the prisoner's apartments. Her ladyship had told her that she had locked up the jewels, which statement Claudine did not credit. The servants, who had seen the prisoner at Annandale Castle, did not at first recollect him when he came to the town house; yet, notwithstanding the metamorphosis in his appearance, they now identified him. Claudine always thought her lady entertained for him a strong dislike, as well as dread.

When the prisoner dined with his lordship, a few days ago, Claudine observed that her

lady seemed agitated and nervous; and, when the party broke up, her ladyship had an hysterical attack.

I add a few more particulars connected with the late terrible event. I have just learned, that among the valuable jewels discovered in the trunks of the Chevalier Carency, some have been identified as having belonged to the late Mrs. Wickenham, the aunt of the wretched Lady Annandale, who was robbed and murdered some fifteen months ago. Two portraits, from which the diamond setting had been broken, were found; and the *femme de chambre* of the deceased lady, who had been sent for, has recognised them, and other articles, as having been the property of her mistress, in whose possession she saw them only the day before her death. The prisoner is, therefore, now accused of the murder of

Mrs. Wickenham; and, what is remarkable, has been identified by the landlord of the village alehouse where he stopped, who recognised him by the circumstance of his wanting the little finger of the left hand; to which fact one of his children drew the landlord's attention when the prisoner was eating his supper.

The culprit evinces the utmost obduracy, and refuses all explanation. Lady Annandale continues in an extremely dangerous state, without a single lucid interval since the death of her husband.

What a fearful monster is this De Carency! but he will soon meet the just punishment of his fiendish atrocities.

I have this moment heard that the guilty and unhappy Lady Annandale is no more. Wretched woman! fearful to others and to

herself have been the effects of her guilt; for, even in the accomplishment of her schemes, she found only the remorse and misery that never fail, sooner or later, to await on crime.

Ever, my dear Mordaunt,

Sincerely yours,

NOTTINGHAM.

THE END.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY J. MOYES, CASTLE STREET, LEICESTER SQUARE.

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